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"SHE LAY UPON THE FLOOR"

ALAN RANSFORD

A Story

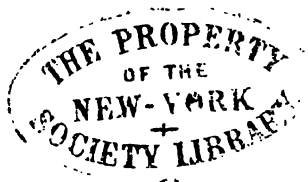
BY

ELLEN DOUGLAS DELAND

AUTHOR OF "IN THE OLD HERRICK HOUSE"
"OAKLEIGH" ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

BY HARRY C. EDWARDS



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7. 1.

ALAN RANSFORD

CHAPTER I

“A HOUSE in Germantown !”

“Whoever would have thought of that ?”

“Whoever would have thought of her leaving us anything at all ? I am sure I am perfectly amazed.”

“I am not. I always knew your cousin Deborah adored you, my dear. I thought she would leave you something if it ever occurred to her to die, but I didn’t suppose she would have that happy inspiration until long after we were all dead and buried ourselves.”

“Richard !”

“But the question is now, What shall we do with it?” continued Mr. Lee, ignoring his wife’s disapproval of his unseemly levity.

Apparently the question was unanswerable, for a sudden silence fell upon the group. It was evening, and, dinner being over, the Lees had left the table and gone into the library, which was directly back of the dining-room. It was a small room, and the innumerable books which lined the walls and filled every available spot on the tables left little space for people.

There were but three of them, however— Mr. and Mrs. Richard Lee, and their only daughter, Loraine, who was barely fifteen. Though young in some respects for her years, in others Loraine was considerably older than many girls of that age, and being the only daughter, she was frequently admitted to the family councils, and expected to express her opinion either for or against any new plan which might be in process of discussion.

“I know just what is in father’s mind,” said Loraine; “he wants to carry out his long-cherished scheme, always frowned down by his family, of moving to the country to live.”

“Yes, I believe he does,” agreed Mrs. Lee. “Would you like it, Loraine?”

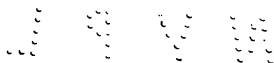
“Would you, mother?”

“I never did care much for the country in winter; but, then, Germantown is not like the depths of the country, and if your father wants to go—”

“And I should be sorry to give up lots of things in town; but country girls have ever so much fun, and it is easy to come to town for anything, and if father wants to—”

“And all this time I have said nothing at all,” observed Mr. Lee. “You don’t really know that I wish to go. I merely asked the question, ‘What shall we do with it?’ and this spirited discussion has been visited upon me.”

“Oh, but we know you! We know you only too well,” said Loraine, putting her arm around her father’s neck as she sat on the arm of his chair. “We know that for years you have been dying to drag us



away from town and live in the country, and now your chance has come. A house left to us, and no excuse for not living in it ourselves."

"On the contrary, every reason for going," said Mr. Lee. "A house which must be fully twice the size of this one, and probably much more conveniently arranged, good grounds about it, pleasant neighborhood—everything that is desirable."

"My dear Richard, it sounds like a real-estate advertisement. Surely you got that out of one of the daily papers!" laughed Mrs. Lee.

She was many years younger than her husband, and looked more like Loraine's sister than her mother. She was a beautiful woman, tall and slender, with dark hair and eyes, and with a lovely graciousness of manner which immediately placed at their ease all those with whom she came in contact; for she was one of those persons who possess the rare gift of drawing out the best that is in others.

"Don't you agree with me, though, that it would be an excellent move to make, Helen?" asked Mr. Lee.

"It does sound attractive, I must confess; and, as the house is on our hands, I suppose it is really an economical move, for we can dispose of this one easily, of course, and to better advantage than the one out there, I imagine. Yes, it certainly seems the thing to do."

The family discussed the matter for some time, and before Loraine went unwillingly to bed it was decided to sell the town house, which was, after all, too small for comfort, and move to the more spacious house in

the country, which had lately been left to them by the will of a somewhat eccentric cousin of Mrs. Lee's.

They had many friends in Germantown and Chestnut Hill, they would be within easy reach of the city, and, as Mrs. Lee had said, there was much to recommend the plan.

The house in question had not been occupied by "Cousin Deborah" herself, but was one which she was in the habit of letting. It had stood empty during the past six months, and was, therefore, in readiness for them to move into whenever they wished; and, as it was now April, there could not be a more delightful and appropriate time for the Lees to take up their residence in the country. Yes, they would go, and go at once.

From that moment the spirit of activity and preparation pervaded the entire establishment. Trunks were brought from the attic, carpets were taken up and pictures taken down, numerous trips were made by Mr. and Mrs. Lee to the Germantown house to see what alterations were necessary there; in fact, the composite intelligence of the entire family was given over to the art of successfully moving—that subject which never fails to fill even the stoutest heart with a sense of discomfort and dread.

But, finally, the last trunk was locked, the last barrel of china was packed, the last bit of furniture was loaded upon the huge vans, and the carriage was at the door in which Mr. and Mrs. Lee were to drive to their destination. Little Miss Moffatt, Loraine's kitten, had been captured and crammed, much against her will, into a basket, whence her piteous wails were

even now making themselves heard, while Evelina, the parrot, sat in injured dignity upon the perch in her cage, too much ruffled to speak after having been so hastily carried to the carriage by the maid whom she particularly disliked.

In fact, everything was accomplished, and the Lees bade good-bye to their city home forever; for the house had been satisfactorily sold, and if they should ever return to the city it would be to another.

Lorraine had gone as usual to school, and was to go out to Germantown later in the day in the first train which she could get after school was over for Tulpehocken, the station nearest to their new abode. Lorraine was very much pleased with the unexpected turn in family affairs. Like her father, she had really always liked the country, and the new house, which she had visited only once even since it had become theirs, seemed to be full of delightful possibilities.

She was to have a large room of her own (until now she had always occupied a very small one), there was a charming garden, there were woods within easy reach, a number of nice girls who lived near—in fact, to the hopeful spirit of fifteen the world looked very bright.

“Lorraine,” said Mrs. Lee that morning, “are you sure that you can find your way? You have only been there once, you know.”

“Of course I can, mother dear! I remember the house perfectly. Is it the third or fourth from the corner? The third, isn’t it?”

But Mrs. Lee’s attention had been claimed by some one else, and in the excitement of the day Lorraine’s question remained unanswered.

School that morning seemed endless, but two o'clock came at last and Loraine was free. She hurried away, arriving at the Broad Street Station fully fifteen minutes before the train was even ready, and, as soon as it was possible, took her seat in the car. Opposite to her and a little in front of her sat two boys who seemed to be having a very good time together, and Loraine found herself watching them with interest.

She liked the face of the one who sat by the window, and whom she could see more plainly than the other. He had light hair and very merry blue eyes, and when he laughed, which he seemed to do a great deal of the time, his face wrinkled up in a comical way which made one smile even to see, while the laugh itself was a most contagious one. Whenever he turned towards his companion she was struck with his singularly open and attractive expression.

The other boy was very broad-shouldered, and his face was an uncommon one. Loraine could not see much of it, but she noticed the unusual formation of the mouth and chin. Once he turned around to look out of the window behind her at something they were passing, and she saw that he had dark eyes, a rather short nose, and a mouth which, though perhaps large, was finely formed.

When the train stopped at Tulpehocken the boys rose to their feet, as did also Loraine. She was about to pass into the aisle when the outside boy—the one with the dark hair—brushed past her, knocking her somewhat rudely with his bag of books, and actually stepping on her foot, for which he did not stop to apologize.

Loraine drew back with a little movement of disapproval. Her face was crimson with indignation, and she drew up her small height and waited haughtily for the other boy to follow his friend. He, however, paused also that she might go first, and Loraine, fearful that the train would begin to move before she had left it, hurried to the door without further delay.

“Great awkward creature!” she said to herself, as she walked hastily away from the station; “never even attempting to apologize! I do hate rude people, and I had been thinking that those boys were so nice. The other one is nice, I am sure. I wonder if they live near us. I hope I shall never see the rude one again, for I simply detest him.”

And with her head held exceedingly high she walked on, quite unconscious of the fact that the two boys were following in her very footsteps about half a square behind.

It was an ideal spring day. To be sure, the roads were somewhat muddy from the April rains, but overhead the sky was blue, with a fleecy white cloud here and there; the birds sang in the trees or hopped busily about to make their nests; a sweet country smell of earth and trees and freshness filled the air, and in the distance could be heard the sounds made by the men who were building a new house, plying their hammers industriously or calling to one another at their work.

Loraine walked quickly up the lane which led from the station. She was of slender build and not very tall. Her face was a trifle thin, perhaps, which made her hazel eyes look even larger than they were. Her

hair was chestnut, with pretty golden threads in it, and hung in a thick braid down her back. Though the face was thin it was rosy with health, for Loraine had been brought up to take plenty of out-door exercise; and, though the features were perhaps not all that they should be for perfect beauty, it was an attractive face, on the whole, which looked out from beneath the wide hat this soft spring day.

"Now let me see," said Loraine to herself. "Here is the corner of Main Street, and here I turn to the left; I walk along here to the second street, and there I turn to the right. I wish I could remember for certain whether it is the third or fourth door from the corner, but I am pretty sure it is the third, and, of course, I shall know when I get there."

The second street was gained and the corner turned, and then Loraine looked about her with still greater interest. As her mother had said, she had only been there once before, notwithstanding the many visits paid by Mr. and Mrs. Lee since the house became theirs, and on that occasion it had all been so exciting for Loraine that she had scarcely noticed the outside of the house. She reached the third gate, and, opening it, she walked up the path to the front door. The houses in this row were set well back from the street, and the shady lawns in front quite screened the inhabitants from the eyes of the passers-by.

"What nice flower-beds," thought Loraine, "and what a pretty lawn! I didn't notice when I was here before that the grounds were in such beautiful order. I didn't notice either that the house had such an old, respectable look, as if the same people had lived here

for years and years. I was so excited that day I came out I really didn't take it in, and then we were driven right to the door from the station, and I suppose that is another reason. I thought there was more of a piazza than just this little porch. I wonder whose bicycle that is. I hope I can get into the house without ringing the bell, for I simply can't wait a minute."

She crossed the little porch, and tried the handle of the door. The latch was down, so she could open it with ease, and in a moment she was in the house.

"I wonder where they are," she said to herself. "Father! Mother!" she called; "where are you all?"

There was no reply, so she opened a door on the right. The room within was quite dark, and she could distinguish nothing.

"That is the parlor, I remember now," thought Loraine, "and they haven't got it fixed yet. Funny to have it so dark; and I can't imagine where father and mother are. I will try the library, and if they are not there I will go to every room in the house."

She opened the door on the other side of the hall, but with the same lack of success. She could see no one there.

"What a huge room!" thought Loraine; "it doesn't look much like our library at home, and nothing looks natural in it! I suppose because it is so much larger, and they haven't arranged it yet."

She stood in the doorway an instant, looking about her, and quite unconscious that she was not alone. From the depths of a large easy-chair, the back of

which was turned towards the window, some one was watching her with an expression of astonishment which rapidly gave place to one of amusement.

"Why, where is everybody?" exclaimed Loraine aloud, impatiently. "They must be up-stairs."

She left the library door open and ran up the first flight.

"I shall open every door I come to until I find them," she continued; and suiting the action to the word, she turned the handle of the door which confronted her on the landing, and burst into the room.

"Are you here?" she cried. "I have been looking for you everywhere. I— Oh!"

The sentence remained unfinished, and Loraine's mouth remained open, fixed as if forever in a round "Oh!" of astonishment.

She saw a large room filled apparently with glass cases, which were arranged in order up and down both sides of the long apartment. It looked something like a shop, except that there were so many cases that one could scarcely thread one's way about. The walls were lined with tall cabinets and shelves, all filled to overflowing, and from the ceiling hung a number of Japanese umbrellas of different sizes and brilliant hues.

In the centre of the room, standing with his face towards the door, was a very short, very stout old gentleman with a red face, and wearing immense spectacles. He was dressed in a brown velvet jacket, which was adorned with elaborate embroidery, and which but partially covered a white waistcoat of amazing rotundity.



“WHAT IS THE TROUBLE?”



“Who are you?” said he, in a voice of appalling sharpness, quite out of keeping with the extreme good-nature of his appearance. “Who are you, and what do you want here?”

“I beg your pardon,” faltered Loraine; “I—I—am looking for my father and mother.”

“Your father and mother!” repeated the old gentleman, still more irascibly, while he stepped forward and brandished a quill-pen which he held in his hand. “And why, may I ask, do you expect to find them here? I assure you I am making no collection of fathers and mothers.”

“Oh no, I don’t suppose you are! I—you see—we are just—”

“What is the trouble?” asked a voice from behind, of such depth and volume that Loraine started in fright. What terrible person was this? Had she found her way into a castle full of ogres?

She turned quickly, and saw behind her a person so tall that her gaze travelled up and up and up before it finally reached his face. When it did, however, it found a very pleasant one, smooth-shaven and smiling, with merry blue eyes, something like those of the boy on the train, and a wonderful amount of flaxen hair which looked not unli’ke a wig. The stout gentleman, on the contrary, was quite bald.

“Who is this person?” asked the stout one, irritably, “and what does she mean by entering my room in this style?”

“A mistake, Simon—a mistake, I am sure,” said the deep voice. “What can we do for you, madam?”

Loraine, more overcome than ever at being ad-

dressed in such stately terms, looked vainly about for some means of escape, but the stout gentleman on the one hand, and the thin one on the other, completely barred the way.

In the meantime the opening and shutting of the front door was heard from below, boyish voices sounded in the hall and masculine footsteps on the stairs. They appeared to be coming from all points at once, for there was a noise of scuffling in the room above, and two more boys came racing down from the third story. In fact, look where she would, Loraine saw herself surrounded by the enemy.

"I—I think I am in the wrong house," she murmured, lifting her eyes once more to the kindly face in the doorway. Then with an effort she summoned all her self-control. "I beg your pardon," she said, with a little stately gesture, which sat oddly on her small person, as she turned towards the stout gentleman. "I would not have disturbed you for the world. We are just moving out. I am Loraine Lee, and we are going to live in the next house—at least, I suppose it is the next one, but I thought it was this."

"A useless mistake," muttered the stout gentleman. "You have made me quite forget the number of stamps. I have lost the thread entirely—lost the thread." And he turned away, grazing the cases as he did so, and shaking them with his mighty bulk.

"Come with me," said the tall gentleman in the doorway. "I can quite understand it. The houses are very much alike" (which was a polite fiction, for

they did not in the least resemble each other). "Boys, make way there!"

He took Loraine by the hand and led her down the stairs between two rows of grinning school-boys. To Loraine it seemed as if there were at least a dozen, but there were really only five, and she recognized among them the two boys who had been near her in the train.

"These are my nephews," said her escort, indicating them with a wave of his hand. "Sidney, Charles, Thomas, and Jimmy West, and Alan Ransford; Miss Loraine Lee. I have no doubt that you will all become good friends, as we shall be next-door neighbors. Very glad the boys are going to have a girl to keep them in order. They need it—they need it sadly; and I give you *carte-blanche*, my dear young lady, to exercise any sort of discipline you wish. What is that?" He stopped suddenly, as the noise of a falling body was heard behind him. "Ah, only Jimmy falling down-stairs. Well, the boys will pick him up. He hasn't done anything of the sort for three days at least, and I had begun to hope the habit was cured."

He did not wait to discover the extent of mischief, if any, that was caused by the fall, and, opening the door for Loraine, he accompanied her down the steps and even along the path and through the gate. The five boys followed at a respectful distance, Jimmy holding his handkerchief to his bleeding nose, the others in various stages of more or less ill-suppressed mirth.

In the meantime Mr. and Mrs. Lee, next door, had begun to wonder what had become of the missing Loraine.

“ Her train must have come long ago,” said Mrs. Lee, anxiously. “ I am afraid she has lost her way. Hannah,” to the maid, “ do take a look out of the window and see if you can catch a glimpse of her.”

Hannah left the trunk which she was unpacking, and went to the window.

“ Here she comes now, ma’am,” she said. “ Mrs. Lee, please come and look !”

Mrs. Lee followed her to the window.

“ Why, what has Lorraine been doing ?” cried she ; “ where has she been, and who are all these people ?”

For up the front walk came Lorraine, looking smaller even than usual by the side of a man who was fully six feet four in height, and followed by no less than five boys of every size and age.

“ It is my old friend Thaddeus West !” exclaimed Mr. Lee, as he looked over his wife’s shoulder. “ You know I told you he lived out here in Germantown somewhere, but I had no idea where. I haven’t seen him for twenty years !”

And he hurried down to meet them.

CHAPTER II

"THAD WEST, by all that is fortunate!" cried Mr. Lee, emerging bareheaded from his front door. "Well, well ; after all these years !"

"You don't mean to tell me this is Dick Lee !" returned the new-comer. "Why, Dickie, you're not a day older than when we went to school together. And so it is your daughter who has been breaking into other people's houses, and required a whole escort of police to bring her home ! And you are the people who are moving next door ! I heard the name was Lee, but it never occurred to me that it might be Dickie Lee."

The two men shook each other warmly by the hand, while Mr. West administered sounding slaps to Mr. Lee's shoulder ; and Mr. Lee, who was a rather small man, threw back his head and looked up at his friend's face, so far above him.

"I might have known it was your daughter, for she is the very image of you," continued Mr. West, "and I knew there was something that was making me like her. My dear," turning to Loraine, "your father and I went to school together. I was older than he, though, by five or six years—how long ago was it ? Twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years—"

"Stop right there, Thad. I declare it isn't ten

years since you were getting into all sorts of scrapes, greatly to my admiration, being only a youngster, and setting the hair of every professor in the school on end."

"So-ho, Uncle Thad!" cried one of the boys, who had drawn nearer during this conversation; "so you got into scrapes yourself, did you? I thought as much."

"Dick, you're telling tales out of school, and letting cats out of bags, and all sorts of things," laughed Mr. West. "What is to become of all my authority if you tell these young scamps about me in this style?"

"And who are these young scamps?" asked Mr. Lee.

"My nephews, every man of them. My brother Thomas's children, you know, four of them, and the other is my sister's son. Simon and I have taken them. You remember my brother Simon? Nice boys, every one of them, but they lead us a dog's life of it—don't you, boys? But, Dick, old fellow, I'm glad to see you, glad to see you! We must be right neighborly. There is only a hedge between us, you see. You must admire my hedge. I've been training it for years, and I'm glad you are to have the benefit of the other side of it. Dear me! it is amazing the way we have lost sight of each other, but Simon and I—well, we have got into a sort of a rut out here. Simon has his collections, you know, and I have my books, and we never go to town if we can help it."

"And though I knew you lived in Germantown, I didn't know where," said Mr. Lee; "and though I knew a family of Wests lived next door to this house,

I understood that it was another family. I'm glad enough to find it is you."

"And I declare it's good to see you," exclaimed Mr. West, again grasping him by the hand. "Have you ~~got~~ any more daughters? Only this one? Well, she's worth a dozen. Send her over—send her over—and we boys will be here whenever we can, you may be sure. Just what we want, to have a nice girl about."

There was some further conversation, and Mr. Lee begged the Wests to come in at once to see Mrs. Lee, but Mr. West declared that it would not do.

"Your wife would never forgive me for coming now. She wouldn't like me, and I couldn't stand that, Dick. No, no; another time."

And off he went, surrounded by his boys, who had been hanging over the gate and watching these proceedings with interest.

Loraine and her father disappeared within the house, when she gave her family a graphic description of her adventure next door.

"Who is the funny, stout gentleman, father?" she asked. "You never saw anybody so fat in all your life, and oh, so cross!"

"Thad's brother Simon," said Mr. Lee, laughing. "He was just that way at school—cross and fat, two attributes that are not supposed to go together. He always had a mania for collecting. Well, well; I'm glad to come across Thad West again. What a lot of boys!"

"And nice-looking ones, too," said Mrs. West. "I am glad of that. I like boys when they are nice, as these seem to be."

"All nice but one," remarked Loraine. "The big, broad-shouldered one, the one that Mr. West said was his sister's son, was very rude to me in the train. I am so sorry he is one of them, for all the others look jolly and pleasant."

"Perhaps he is nicer than he looks," suggested her mother. "You can't always tell."

"But he was rude, mother," said Loraine, shaking her head wisely, "and you know rudeness is so disagreeable. But I am just crazy to see the house. Doesn't it look lovely and bright, and how much you have gotten it fixed!"

The room they were in was the library, and already the books had been unpacked and arranged in the cases, while the pictures stood about, leaning against the wall in readiness for being hung. The April sun streamed in at the windows—of which there were four in the room—making it look bright and cheerful, and there was a sense of space and air which was very pleasing to this town-bred family.

Presently Loraine was taken up to the spacious room which was to be hers. It had been newly furnished for her as a birthday gift, but of this she had been told nothing. Loud were her exclamations of surprise and delight when she entered the pretty room, and saw for the first time the beautiful brass bedstead, the dainty dressing-table, the muslin curtains at the window, and the thousand and one things which go to make up a girl's room.

"We didn't hang your pictures, for we thought you would like to do *that* yourself," said Mrs. Lee. "Are you pleased, dear? How do you like the paper?"

"It is the loveliest in the world!" said Loraine, solemnly, standing in the middle of the room and looking about her. "Oh, you dear, dear people! Mother, you are an angel for giving me such a perfect room; and, father, you are another for saying we must come to the country to live; and you both are for giving me such a present!" and she hugged first one and then the other.

"I think you had better add that Cousin Deborah, whom none of us were very fond of during her lifetime, was still another, to leave us this house," remarked Mr. Lee. "I never supposed that I should come to reverence the name of your cousin Deborah, Helen, but it shows what an effect a small legacy will have. The moral of it is, leave something when we die to those who least love us!"

The family worked hard all day, and by night it really seemed as if they had been settled for months in their new home. They went early to bed, and at ten o'clock the lights were out and the house reduced to a stillness so profound that one might almost suppose it to be as empty as it had been before the coming of the Lees.

It was not so next door. The boys had been sent to bed, but they had not gone. Mr. Thaddeus West sat with his book in the library, laughing occasionally to himself as his attention wandered from the printed page before him and strayed to the past, brought back so vividly by the unexpected meeting with his old school-mate.

Mr. Simon West was shut up as usual with his collections, where he roamed from case to case and gazed

fondly at the treasures within, or made alterations in his manuscript catalogue, which lay upon the desk.

All was quiet down-stairs, but up-stairs bedlam was let loose. A mighty pillow-fight raged in the third story. Figures of all sizes and clothed in every style of costume, from pajamas to shirt-sleeves, darted about, in and out of doors or around corners, while pillows flew madly from room to room. Presently there was a crash. Sidney West, not content with a pillow, had seized a carpet footstool, and sent it with unerring aim straight at Jimmy's head. The footstool had not only felled Jimmy to the ground, but had overturned on its way a pitcher of water that stood on the wash-stand, and now the sound of Jimmy's sobs, which he made no effort to suppress, was mingled with the drip of water, which flowed in a steady stream from the wash-stand to the floor.

"Oh, I say, Jimmy, don't be a baby over it!" said Sidney. "I'm sorry I hurt you, but why under the sun are you always in the way? I believe if I aimed for the moon, you'd be just in the line of the ball. I meant to hit Alan. Just his luck not to get it! I say, shut up, will you, Jimmy? You'll have Uncle Simon up here next."

The others gathered about and vainly besought Jimmy to cease from weeping, but the footstool had really hurt, and Jimmy was determined that his brothers should be made fully aware of the fact. He was tired of being unfortunate, and he would cry.

"I can't help it," he sobbed; "it h-hurts awful bad, and I didn't cry when I f-fell down-stairs to-day, and I didn't c-cry when Tom pinched my finger in

the d-door, and I didn't cry much when Ch-Charlie f-filled my soup with salt ; but that old stool hurt, and I'm *going* to cry !”

And to carry out his threat he opened his mouth and uttered a long, loud howl of misery.

“Shut up, young one, do !” entreated Alan. “Sid didn't mean to hurt you ; he meant it for me, and you know it will be an awful bore to have Uncle Simon come up.”

But Uncle Simon, instead of coming up, had gone down to complain to his brother, and in due time Uncle Thaddeus appeared in the doorway, and, after comforting Jimmy and scolding Sidney, ordered them all to bed, and then picked up a pillow himself and sent it after the last boy who left the room. This was a signal for all to begin over again, and there is no knowing how long it would have continued if Uncle Simon's voice had not been heard from the foot of the stairs.

“Thaddeus, if those boys are not quiet soon, I will turn them out of the house, every one. I will ! I mean it ! And has it been raining, or what has happened up there ? For there is a leak in the ceiling of my dressing-room—a large spot of moisture—a large spot, I say ! And if those boys have been the cause of it, I will turn them out of the house—every one. I will ! I mean it !”

The culprits up-stairs looked at one another in dismay. Sidney and Charles began vigorously to mop up the floor ; but too tardily, for the mischief had already been done, and Uncle Thaddeus hurried away to calm the perturbed spirit of his brother.

“It is nothing to you, Thaddeus, of course,” said Mr. Simon West. “You don’t mind these things. You like boys, you always did like a noise, you always did put up with everything. But I am different; I am not made that way. In fact, I think I am quite different from other people.”

And Mr. Simon West sighed profusely and returned to his collections, while Mr. Thaddeus tiptoed upstairs again and entreated his nephews to be more careful in future of their uncle’s feelings.

It was five or six years now since this bachelor household had been invaded by four noisy, utterly irrepressible, but on the whole very nice, boys. Thaddeus and Simon West had lived together in undisturbed quiet for many years, and fully expected to live so for many more, when their brother Thomas had died. His wife had soon followed him, and their four boys were left to the guardianship of their uncle Thaddeus.

It had been Simon’s frequently expressed opinion that all should be sent at once to boarding-school, but Thaddeus objected to this. Jimmy, the youngest, was but six years old, while Sidney, the eldest, was barely twelve. It seemed wrong that they should have no home-life at all. Besides, Mr. Thaddeus had a secret longing for their presence. The house seemed very lonely at times, and Uncle Thad’s heart had never grown old, whatever his years may have been; and so, contrary to his usual habit, he held out firmly against Simon’s objections, and, before long, Sidney and Charles and Tom and Jimmy were permanently settled beneath the roof of the two uncles, who were so unlike one another in every respect.

About a year before the story opens their number had been augmented by the coming of Alan Ransford, another orphan nephew of whom Uncle Thaddeus was also left guardian, and now the masculine family was complete.

"Thank goodness, there are no more boys who can possibly turn up," said Mr. Simon West. "Unless Thaddeus brings in vagrants from the street he can't possibly find any. Dear me—dear me! It is astonishing how different I am from Thaddeus. He is certainly a very strange person—quite abnormal, I believe. Five boys! Dear me, dear me!"

One rule Mr. Simon West had made upon the coming of his nephews, and thus far it had been strictly adhered to. Not one of them was ever to be allowed to enter the room which contained his precious collections. Under penalty of the severest known punishment this rule was enforced, and though the boys were one and all more or less desirous of breaking it they really did not dare.

Perhaps the idea of being punished did not deter them as much as Uncle Thad's entreaties. He had called them all to his library together one day and had stated the case to them plainly.

"I don't care what you do to my things," he said, "as long as you don't deface my books nor trample on my flower-beds; but I beg that you will not disturb your uncle Simon, because—well, boys, I may as well tell you plainly that your uncle and I are very different in some respects. Simon is the very soul of goodness—he always was; but he is naturally quick. To use an old joke with a new application, he and I are the long

and the short of it in temper as well as height. I can endure things which he cannot, and he would feel very badly to have his collections touched in any way, and I should feel responsible if they were, because I insisted upon your coming here to live. Not that Uncle Simon isn't glad to have you ! Not at all, not at all."

"Oh, see here, now, Uncle Thad," interrupted Sidney, "you needn't try to make us think that Uncle Simon wanted us to come ! We know better. But you did want us, and we think you are a jolly good uncle, and so if you would rather we never went into that room, we won't. I'll answer for myself, and I'm pretty sure the others will say the same thing. But I would like just to see what Uncle Simon has ~~got~~ tucked away up there. Couldn't we go just once, if we promised to be awfully careful and you went with us ?"

Upon this Mr. Thaddeus hurried away to obtain the required permission from Mr. Simon, which, to judge from his long absence, was no easy matter to procure. He finally returned, however, and informed them that if each would promise severally upon his honor to touch nothing, not even the top of a glass case, with the tip of his finger, Uncle Simon would receive them at once.

The promise was joyfully given, and the procession ascended the stairs and entered the room. Uncle Simon welcomed them with a short snort of disapproval, and then hovered near while they made the tour of the apartment and gazed curiously at the remarkable objects within the cases.

From his earliest years Simon West had been a collector, but his hobby had been a changing one, for he

had hoarded first one set of articles and then another, until he had finally become a collector of collections. In one glass case were birds' eggs, in another were stamps, in a third were coins, and so on indefinitely. Horseshoes, pencils, buttons, bells, fans, strangely shaped bones, calendars, teapots, spoons—in fact, all varieties of objects that could possibly be thought of were arranged with methodical care in the cases. As his interest in a new article was awakened he would turn gradually from the old collection to the new, and consider the former closed.

The boys, of course, were deeply interested in all that they saw, and gazed admiringly at their uncle's possessions, which were as absorbing as the contents of a museum. They behaved with great decorum, and all went well until they were about to leave. In fact, Uncle Simon was so impressed by their extreme quiet, and so flattered by their interest, that there is no doubt that he would have invited them to come again had not an untimely accident occurred.

Jimmy, imbued with the idea that everything in the room formed part of a collection, and must, therefore, be examined, and forgetting his promise to touch nothing, undertook when no one was looking that way to experiment with his uncle's quill pen, left temptingly near the open inkstand on his desk. The result may be imagined. The inkstand was upset, a black stream slowly but surely trickled its inky way across the immaculate page of the manuscript catalogue, and Jimmy, ever unfortunate, was led in disgrace from the room, with the assurance ringing in his ears, and oftentimes repeated by his uncle Simon, that never

again should one of them be allowed to cross the threshold.

Poor Uncle Thaddeus, sadly discomforted by the result of the expedition, brought up the rear of the retreating army, and, to atone for his brother's harshness, invited them almost with tears to go for a trolley ride at once, and try to be happy.

This had all happened several years ago, but never since had the boys been permitted to enter the room. Alan Ransford had never been there, and, naturally enough, his curiosity was aroused by what his cousins told him. However, his uncle Simon did not invite him to come, and his uncle Thaddeus had plead with him as he had with his other nephews on the subject, and up to this moment Alan had refrained from making any effort to penetrate the mysterious and, therefore, fascinating museum.

Alan Ransford's life had been a somewhat peculiar one. His mother had died when he was very young, and his father, who had been obliged by his business to travel a great deal, had taken the boy with him. They had been to England and to Germany, to San Francisco and to Honolulu, and were just about to embark for South America when Mr. Ransford suddenly died.

It was a crushing grief to the boy, for the father and son were very dear to one another. Mr. Ransford was a reserved man who made but few friends, and had no near relatives, and now there seemed no one to whom Alan could turn. Then Uncle Thaddeus had come to the rescue, and he was told that his home should now be with him, and his four cousins

had welcomed him warmly, and at once made him one of themselves. Women and girls Alan had never known at all. He was extremely shy in their presence, and he fancied that he did not like them nor they him; consequently, his manner towards them when by any chance he happened to be thrown with them was apt to be brusque and even disagreeable.

The truth was that he, the doughty full-back of the school football-team, the leader in every sport which required courage and presence of mind—in fact, the lion of the school—was miserably, abjectly afraid of girls. His cousins knew this, and it afforded them no end of amusement among themselves, but they refrained from teasing Alan too unmercifully. He was a great favorite with them, and the friendship between him and Sidney, who was very nearly his own age, was already a close one. Even the fact that Sidney was extremely fond of the society of girls, and was ever ready to seek it, made no difference. Alan contented himself with regarding his cousin as something queer and unusual, and allowed him to follow his own inclinations.

He was sorry to find that there was a girl in the family that had moved next door, for he felt quite sure that Sidney, aided and abetted by his uncle Thaddeus, would spend most of his time there; and, indeed, the very evening after their coming Uncle Thad suggested that he, with Sidney and Alan, should go in there to call.

In vain did Alan protest and declare that nothing would induce him to go, that Sidney must represent the family, that he formally ^Ycall upon a girl would be

more than he could bring himself to do. His uncle Thaddeus for once held out firmly, and before long the tall uncle and his two nephews were ringing the door-bell on the other side of the hedge which separated the two places.

CHAPTER III

It was an attractive scene which Mr. West and the boys beheld when they entered their neighbor's library that evening. Mr. Lee was reading the evening paper by the lamp on the table, Mrs. Lee was knitting, and Loraine sat at a small table near engaged with her lessons for the next day; while Miss Moffatt, the kitten, played with her tail on the hearth-rug, and the parrot in its cage swung in one of the windows.

Shaded lamps placed here and there lighted up the soft tints of the wall-paper and the varied bindings of the books, and there was a general air of comfort and cosiness which appealed to Mr. Thaddeus West, confirmed bachelor though he was.

The visitors were cordially welcomed, and very soon Mr. West and Mr. Lee were laughing together over old times, which they described at length to Mrs. Lee, while Sidney and Loraine were chatting away as if they had known one another all their lives. Alan alone was ill at ease, and although Loraine honestly made a great effort to draw him out of his shell, he found it impossible to respond to her kindly intentions, and answered all her remarks with the shortest monosyllables.

Finally Mrs. Lee came to the rescue, and she met with better success. Alan quite warmed under her

kindly smile and her gentle manner, and actually grew interested in telling her of his visit to the Sandwich Islands, about which she had asked him.

Under cover of the buzz of general conversation he was growing really eloquent, when an unfortunate incident occurred. As sometimes happens when a number of people are together, a sudden silence fell upon all of them at once with the exception of Alan himself. In quite an audible tone he remarked, "And I saw Queen Liliuokalani—the one who came here, you know. She is—" and there he stopped short, overcome by the fact that no one else was speaking. Immediately a loud, harsh voice exclaimed :

"Shut up, you bad boy ! Don't talk so much ! Hold your tongue !"

Alan started and flushed crimson, while even Mr. West and Sidney looked surprised ; but Mr. Lee hastened to explain :

"It is only Evelina, the parrot," said he, laughing. "She has a way of conversing when she is least expected to. You mustn't mind anything she says."

Alan, however, was silenced for the remainder of the evening, and even a full description of the parrot's remarkable conversational powers failed to restore his equanimity. He could not recover from the shock of being told to hold his tongue.

Sidney, on the contrary, was highly entertained, and from that moment devoted himself to the bird, trying in vain to make her say something more. Evelina merely cocked her head on one side and winked at him in a way which was quite irresistible.

"How did you ever happen to name her Evelina ?"

asked Sidney. "I thought parrots were always called 'Polly.'"

"So they are," said Loraine; "but we thought we would be more original than that, and then it seemed appropriate to call her Evelina on account of her song. I will try to get her to sing for you. Evelina, dear Evelina, *please* sing!" continued the girl in her most persuasive tones, and humming a few bars of the air herself.

Presently, to the astonishment of the visitors, the parrot, in a most unmusical and strident voice, began to sing,

"Dear Ev-e-*leen*-a, sweet Ev-e-*leen*-a,
My love for you can *nev*-er, never die!"

And so on to the end of the stanza.

This accomplishment was greatly admired, and there is no knowing how long the Wests would have stayed if the hall clock had not been heard to strike, and Mr. West realized that they had been there fully two hours; so he bade an unwilling good-night, and soon the front door had closed behind him and the two nephews, who had left very different impressions upon their hostesses.

"Sidney is a dear," said Loraine. "He is just as nice as he can be, but Alan is dreadful. I don't care what Sidney may say about him—he was telling me about him when you were talking to Alan, mother—I shall never like him. He was very rude. He barely answered when I spoke to him, and quite turned his back upon me. Then he sat right down in the chair I had been sitting in before any of us were seated;

even *you* were standing. He is a perfect bear; don't you think so, mother?"

"My dear Loraine, you are entirely too harsh in your judgments," replied Mrs. Lee. "The poor boy is painfully diffident, and he did those things not from rudeness, but from extreme shyness. Instead of criticising him so sweepingly, it would be much better to try to help him."

"My dearest mother, I did my best. I am sure I asked him endless questions about football, baseball, cricket, swimming, fishing, shooting—every possible sport that boys are supposed to like and girls not to know anything about—but they do, all the same—and he would only say 'Yes' or 'No' to them all, and you know that does become monotonous in the course of time."

"Well, say what you will, I like him," said Mrs. Lee. "He has a good face, and the poor boy has never known what it is to have a mother. I mean to take him under my wing."

"Dear, dear! When mother says that, we know what she means," exclaimed Loraine, pretending to be dismayed. "The truth is, mother dearest, you are so flattered by being the one person whom the bear would speak to that you intend to adopt him at once. Well, please let me know when he is coming, that I may prepare myself for having my chair sat in, my toes stepped on, my pencil knocked down and not picked up, and anything else that may happen when bears are at large!"

It did not take long for the Lees to become settled in their new home, and before spring had blossomed

into summer they felt as if they had been living there for years.

They had already known a number of Germantown people, and many more had called upon them, among whom was a near neighbor whom they were disposed to like very much. This was Mrs. Neal Gordon, whom Mrs. Lee had met before she came to the country to live, and between whom and herself had already sprung up a warm friendship. Mrs. Gordon, who had not been married more than two or three years, lived in a charming little house that was just around the corner from the Lees', and it was probable that they would see much of one another.

There were a number of girls who lived in the neighborhood, among them one whose name was Ethel Foster, a school-mate of Loraine's, who lived within easy reach of the Lees' house, and who, since Loraine moved to Germantown, had spent a large part of her time with her.

Ethel was a tiny creature, with hair of a peculiar flaxen color and light eyes that had a way of narrowing down to mere slits when their owner wished, or of opening very large and wide.

Loraine found Ethel very fascinating. She was a bright girl, nearly a year older than Loraine, and, being somewhat of a leader in the school, it was natural, perhaps, that Loraine should feel flattered by the preference which Ethel now lost no opportunity of making evident.

The girls went to town together in the train every day to school, and returned together whenever they could do so, and, in fact, rapidly became as intimate

as it is possible for girls to do in an astonishingly short space of time.

One morning in June, Loraine came into the house with what was to her a most interesting piece of news.

"Mother, dear, I just met Mrs. Gordon," said she, "and she told me that her sister is coming to live with her for a whole year. It has all been arranged very unexpectedly. The sister's name is Janet Franklin, and she is just my age. Mrs. Gordon wants us to be very good friends, and she has invited me there to meet her, Wednesday night. I am to go to dinner. Isn't it fun? She hasn't asked Ethel Foster, but I don't think Mrs. Gordon likes Ethel very much. I wonder why."

"It isn't difficult to discover why," said Mrs. Lee, who was arranging flowers. She was sitting at the dining-room table with a large tray in front of her, and innumerable pitchers, vases, and bowls which she was filling with the lovely blossoms that had been brought in from the garden. "I think neither Mrs. Gordon nor I find Ethel as attractive as you do, Loraine. She talks entirely too much, in the first place," said Mrs. Lee, leaning back to study the effect of a rose which she had just placed in a tall glass.

"Mother, how can you say so?" cried Loraine, firing up at once in defence of her friend. "I don't think Ethel talks a bit too much. I only wish I could say as many clever things as she does."

"I am very thankful that you can't, my dear child. Your father and I would be quite worn out! There, never mind, dear! We like you better just as you are. Run, get me another vase, please. The old



MOTHER AND DAUGHTER



glass pitcher in the cabinet will do, only do be careful not to drop it, for it is such an heirloom."

Loraine obeyed, feeling somewhat tried, however, and her mother, seeing this, changed the subject.

"I wonder what kind of a girl Mrs. Gordon's sister is," said she.

"From what Mrs. Gordon said, I think she must be up to all sorts of fun," replied Loraine, feeling mollified at once. "Mrs. Gordon is so nice herself, I think the sister must be; and so is Mr. Gordon, and the baby is a dear. So is everybody in Germantown except the bear. I met him this morning and he scarcely lifted his cap. But I am glad Janet Franklin is coming. We shall have an awfully good time together if we only like each other."

In due time Janet Franklin arrived, and the two became acquainted. Though quite unlike in disposition and temperament, perhaps for that very reason they soon became friends. Janet was a tall, handsome girl of fifteen, with laughing brown eyes and a quantity of dark wavy hair. She was one who seemed disposed to enjoy everything which came in her way, and this year's visit which she was to make to her sister, Cynthia Gordon, presented untold possibilities of pleasure.

One morning towards the end of June, when the summer vacation had begun and the days of leisure from study were filled with the charm of novelty, Loraine, Janet, and Ethel had betaken themselves to the foot of the Lees' garden.

A platform had been built in the branches of a wide-spreading tree by one of the former residents, and on

this platform the girls were fond of sitting. Here they brought their work and their books, and here the boys from next door were sure of finding them. Sidney and Tom were apt to join them here, but Alan Ransford kept carefully away. Although he had become an ardent admirer of Mrs. Lee, and rejoiced for days after meeting her and receiving one of her charming and gracious smiles, he never came to the house.

He and Charlie went off for long rides on their wheels, or spent hours in the woods, or played tennis and cricket at the club ; but he never, if he could possibly avoid it, encountered either of the dreaded girls who spent their days on the other side of the hedge.

"I am so glad to find you two girls here," said Janet, "and all those boys. What jolly times we shall have ! I am awfully sorry mamma was ill and obliged to go abroad, but as long as she was I am glad I was sent on to Cynthia instead of staying with Edith in Brenton. Edith is my other sister. She is married, too, and Jack and Willy, my two brothers, are going to live there until my father and mother come back."

"It must be nice to have brothers and sisters," said Loraine. "I have never had any."

"It is nice, but it must be fun to be the only one, too. You can have things just as you like. Ours is such a mixed-up family, strangers can never get us straight. Mamma is my step-mother, and Neal Gordon is her brother and married Cynthia. So you see mamma is Cynthia's sister-in-law as well as her step-mother, and papa is uncle as well as grandfather to

Cynthia's baby. Oh, Loraine, who is that funny old man on the other side of the hedge?"

From their perch they could command a fine view of the next place, and, at this moment, Mr. Simon West, who was taking a constitutional in his garden, came into sight.

"Isn't he too funny!" laughed Janet. "Did you ever see any one so fat, or in such queer clothes? Do tell me who he is."

"Haven't you heard before about him?" said Loraine, in some surprise. "We mustn't talk too loud or he will hear us. He is Mr. Simon West, the boys' other uncle. He is the collector, you know, and he has all sorts of queer things put away in glass cases that he allows no one to see—at least, none of the boys."

"How mean of him! What is the use of collecting them if he doesn't let any one see them? What kind of things are they?"

"Oh, everything under the sun. He has different fancies. Just now, I believe, it is walking-sticks, but the boys don't really know much about it, as they are never allowed there."

"Why, I never heard of such a thing, Loraine!"

"I never did, either," said Ethel. "It is perfectly absurd, and, of course, he is the laughing-stock of Germantown."

"I intend to see them, anyhow," said Janet, with determination. "It is just what I feel like doing. How do you suppose we could manage it?"

"Janet, what do you mean? Of course, we can't see them unless Mr. West says we can. Would you

break into the house to do it? I got in there by mistake the day we moved out, and he scolded me so I was frightened nearly to pieces."

"I shall find some way of seeing them," replied Janet, nodding her head resolutely as she spoke. "It is just the kind of thing I should love to do, and I mean to carry it through."

"And I would be willing to wager a good deal that you succeed," said a voice from below, and at the same moment Sidney West's head appeared on a level with the platform. "I'll help you all I can. I'd like to get ahead of Uncle Simon once before I die."

"Oh, how you did startle us!" exclaimed the three girls together. "How long have you been listening?"

"Oh, not more than an hour or so," replied Sidney, while Tom followed him into the tree. "Long enough to hear your plans. Do you really mean that you are going to see the collections?"

"Of course we do," cried Janet, "and you will help us all you can, and you will come, too."

"No, I won't do that," said Sidney; "I won't go myself, on Uncle Thad's account. He asked us not to, but he never said anything about not helping any one else to, and I mean to do it."

"So do I," said Tom. "Uncle Simon is an old bear—that's what he is!"

The three girls exchanged glances at this, and Janet remarked, demurely:

"You seem to have quite a bear-garden in there on the other side of the hedge."

"What do you mean?" asked Tom.

"Is that what you call us?" demanded Sidney.

"Oh, not all of you."

"We may as well tell them," said Loraine. "We call your cousin a bear, because he is always so cross?"

"Alan cross!" exclaimed both brothers in surprise. "Why, he is the best-natured old fellow that ever lived! What makes you think he is cross?"

"Only from experience," said Loraine. "He won't have anything to do with us, and scarcely deigns to speak to us."

"Oh, that is because you are girls. Alan hates girls; that is—"

"There, you needn't say another word!" cried Loraine. "He hates girls—that is just it, and so I call him a bear, and I always shall call him a bear. Why does he hate us, I should like to know?"

"My stars, you needn't get so mad over it!" said Sidney, laughing. "He doesn't hate you in particular, only *all* girls. The truth is, he is afraid of you."

"I believe he does hate us in particular, and I should just like to teach him that girls are very nice creatures indeed, and nothing to be afraid of, and that he ought to be proud to know any girls. Only I don't want to have anything more to do with him than I can possibly help. He is detestable."

"Indeed, he isn't at all," said Sidney, warmly. "Alan Ransford is the best fellow that ever lived. He is the soul of honor and courage, and everything else. Why, he is the most popular fellow in school, both with the fellows and the professors. Even old Maberly likes Alan. He doesn't say much, but he is always 'all there,' and he is worth all the rest of us put together."

"Well, I don't agree with you," said Loraine, "but I beg your pardon for having said so much against your cousin. I ought not to have done it, and mother would have been horrified if she had heard me. She likes Alan, but I am sorry to say I don't. He makes no secret of not liking me, and I can't believe it is all shyness, as mother says it is. However, please excuse me, Sidney, for talking so about him."

"Oh, that is all right," said Sidney; "only I am sorry about it—sorry that you don't get on better, I mean."

"But now we must plan how we shall see the collections," interposed Janet Franklin, who had not spoken for some time. "I *must* see them! Now, what can you suggest?"

"We shall have to think it over," said Sidney, musingly. "Once in a great while Uncle Simon goes to town, and, as he hasn't been for three or four months, I shouldn't wonder if he would be going soon. He always locks and double-locks the door, though, and I don't see how you could get in. I can't very well steal his keys."

"No, of course not; but it seems as if there must be some way of managing it," said Janet.

"Doesn't he ever have the room cleaned?" asked Ethel Foster.

"Yes, that is done once in a while by Phoebe, the cook. She is used to doing it, and she is so careful that Uncle Simon trusts her, for a wonder. But she wouldn't let you in for anything. You needn't think there is any chance there."

"You wait and see," said Janet. "I mean to see

those curiosities, and I shall find some way of getting there. I may need your help and I may not."

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed Tom. "Seems to me you are getting pretty grand. I don't see how you are going to get into the house at all unless we help you, and we might tell on you and get you into an awful scrape."

"Of course you won't do that," returned Janet. "I know you are not that kind of boys."

"No, of course not," said Sidney; "Tom is only trying to frighten you. But what is Loraine looking so sober about? She hasn't spoken for the last half-hour."

"I am thinking over something," replied Loraine, "and I really haven't heard much that you have been saying. Is Janet really going to see the collections?"

"Of course I am, and so is Ethel; and you are, too, Loraine. Only do tell me what you have been thinking about?"

"I have been wondering if what Sidney said about Alan Ransford is true, really—that he is afraid of us girls, and that is why he is so queer and rude. Mother says the same thing, but, somehow, I can't believe it."

"Indeed, it is true," said Sidney, earnestly. "Alan has never been with girls in his life. He has always been knocking round with his father in hotels and steamers. He never went regularly to school even until he came here to live. He just went for a few months at a time wherever they happened to be living. And he has always had queer ideas about girls, and nothing I can say on the subject seems to have any effect. There is only one thing that would."

"What is that?"

"For you girls to take him in hand and show him what you really are; that you are nothing to be afraid of. He seems to think now that you are always laughing at him every time he does anything awkward or rude."

Loraine looked rather conscience-stricken.

"I am afraid we do," said she, contritely. "It is strange, mother was talking to me on this very subject this morning. She said she thought women had a good deal of responsibility in that way. That we could influence boys a good deal, and she thought that, as Alan was right within our reach, we ought to try to help him and make him think differently about us, rather than laugh at him or dislike him."

"Your mother is a brick," said Sidney. "I thought so from the first moment I laid eyes on her. Will you really do it, Loraine? Al is a dear old fellow, and he is just the kind you would like if you only knew him better."

"Well, I believe I will try," said Loraine, her pretty hazel eyes fixed thoughtfully upon space. "I don't like him now, I must confess, but I want to make him feel differently about girls, and I verily believe I will try. Will you help, girls?"

"Dear me, I shouldn't be of the slightest use at that sort of thing," replied Janet. "I have to take people as I find them. I can't waste my time trying to reform them, but I think it is awfully nice of you, Loraine, to say you will do it, and you had better get Cynthia to help you. She would love to, I know. I

can think of nothing at present but how I am to get into that curiosity-room."

"But won't you, Ethel?" pleaded Loraine. "Please help me, there's a dear!"

"What nonsense!" said Ethel, opening her eyes to their widest extent. "Do you suppose I am going to bother myself about Alan Ransford? I can't endure the boy, and I don't care who knows it. But I am crazy to see those curiosities, and if you do break in there, Janet, don't leave me out, for I want to go, too."

That very night Sidney went in to the Lees', with a stealthy manner that was so unlike his customary openness that had any one been watching him they would have suspected at once that something was in the wind. He did not find Janet Franklin there, as he had expected, but Loraine was sitting on the steps of the piazza with a book, while Mrs. Lee was busy over her flower-beds, in spite of the fact that her husband was waiting for her to go to drive. Sidney seated himself on the step by Loraine.

"It is all going to work beautifully," said he.

"What is?"

"Uncle Simon—" he stopped, and looked anxiously about. "Do you suppose any one can hear me?"

"No, of course not. Mother never hears anything when she is with her flowers, and father is too much absorbed in the horses to even know you are here."

"My eye, what a snub! However, Uncle Simon—"

He again stopped, and the parrot's voice was heard appallingly near:

"Simple Simon met a pie-man going to the fair.

Said Simple Simon, 'Oh, my eye, what a bad boy you are! Shut up!'

Sidney looked so frightened that Loraine shouted with laughter.

"It is only Evelina!" said she.

"That bird will be the death of me," groaned Sidney. "Whoever taught her to say 'Simon'?"

"Oh, she knows everything. She is always bringing out something new that we never have heard before. Indeed, she is an awfully clever parrot. But go on! I am crazy to hear what you have to tell me."

"Well, then, Uncle Simon is going to town to-morrow, and the room is to be regularly house-cleaned. I heard him giving directions to Phœbe to-night. And Uncle Thad is going to be away, too. They have to go to town together to attend to some business, so here is the girls' chance if they are ever going to do it. Suppose we go around there now and tell Janet."

"Do you think we ought to?" asked Loraine, somewhat hesitatingly. "It doesn't seem as if it were the right thing to do."

But even as she spoke the question was settled for her. Janet Franklin and Ethel Foster came into sight, and in a few moments had joined the group on the steps of the piazza.

CHAPTER IV

THE sun had not been up many hours that Wednesday morning in June before Mr. Simon West was stirring about the house. To him it was one of the most notable days in the whole year, for not only was he to go to town to transact some important business connected with the estate, not only was his precious museum to be left to the mercies of Phœbe, the cook (who, though eminently faithful was yet liable to err), but he was to visit a certain little shop, all unknown to brother Thaddeus, and there possess himself of a valuable article which he had seen advertised in yesterday's *Ledger*.

It was by mere chance that the notice had caught his eye, and Mr. Simon fairly hugged himself with satisfaction when he thought how nearly it had happened that he had not read yesterday's *Ledger*.

"I came very near missing it," said he to himself; "very near it, indeed. It was simply by accident that I picked it up and saw the advertisement."

And for the twentieth time Mr. West took out his large leather pocket-book and looked at the slip of newspaper which he had laid safely away in an inner compartment :

FOR SALE.—At a moderate price, a valuable gold-headed cane, Chinese design. Owner in need of money. Ford's, 1503 North Cranberry Street.

Uncle Simon chuckled with delight.

"A rare find," said he. "I have none of Chinese design, and, from the wording of the advertisement, I am quite sure it will be a bargain. Never heard of Cranberry Street, but what of that? What of that? I will look it up in the Directory. It will never do to tell Thaddeus. He would make a fuss. Thaddeus is so extraordinary—so different from me. No one would ever suppose we were brothers. I defy any one to guess it. He thinks I spend money foolishly, and I am sure I think he does, for he is quite extravagant, *I* think, in the matter both of books and boys. Well, well, this is a find!"

And then he laid the clipping carefully away again. So absorbed was he in planning his course of action for the day, how best to elude Thaddeus's watchful eye, and how much money to provide himself with for the intended purchase, that he was actually quite careless in regard to affairs at home. To be sure, Phœbe had cleaned the museum so often that it scarcely seemed possible that she should require further instruction than that which Mr. West had already given her, but, on the way to Philadelphia in the train, he regretted that he had not warned her again not to bear too heavily upon the tops of the glass cases when she wiped them off, and to be sure to stuff the crack under the door of the little closet with newspaper before she began to sweep.

His bunch of keys had been left in her charge, for the door closed with a dead-latch, and though Phœbe had been ordered not to leave the room until she had finished it, still she might be obliged to go down-

stairs for a broom or a brush which she had forgotten, and in that case she must certainly close the door behind her to keep out meddlesome boys, and would require the latch-key to open it again.

But Mr. Simon West soon dismissed all misgivings from his mind and gave himself up to pleasant dreams of the gold-headed cane which was soon to be his, while he settled his broad-brimmed palmetto hat more firmly on his massive head and waved to and fro the huge palm-leaf fan which he had brought for use in the train, for the day was a hot one. He paid but little attention to the various gentlemen who paused at their seat to greet his brother Thaddeus, but gazed from the window, absorbed apparently in contemplation of the landscape.

In the meantime the boys at home were making the most of their liberty. Although Uncle Thaddeus was so lenient, it was necessary to pay some attention to decorum when he was about; and then, if any one raised his voice above a whisper, or landed from the stairs with a flying leap, or did anything else which boys have done since the world began, Uncle Simon was sure to come forth from his retreat with a sharp rebuke, and, as Sidney expressed it, "make the fur fly." So to-day, with the two cats away, the five mice proceeded to make merry.

The first thing to do was to play that the house was on fire. This was a game that had long been dreamed of, and though Tom was the real originator of the plan, from the time that he had first imparted his inspiration to his brothers until now, it had been the one darling wish of their hearts. It seemed impossi-

ble that the time had at last arrived for it to be carried into effect.

Alan and Sidney were to be the fire department, while Charlie, Tom, and Jimmy were to be the inhabitants of the burning dwelling. It was suggested that Loraine and the other girls should be invited to join the game, as it would make it so much more thrilling if there were girls to rescue; but as Alan declared that he would have nothing to do with it if they were bidden, and as it was really necessary that he should be one of the hook-and-ladder company, this idea was given up.

Sidney warned them, however, that he should be obliged to leave them at eleven o'clock, as he had an engagement with the girls at that hour. This subjected him to no small amount of teasing from the others, but that did not affect him in the smallest degree, and the game began.

Fortunately for their purpose, the kitchen was so remote from the front of the house, which was to be the scene of the sport, that there was no danger of their being overheard by the servants. In addition to Phœbe, who acted as cook, the Messrs. West employed two younger and more frivolous women in their household, and they also were taking advantage of the day. With both masters away they intended to go forth to see their friends, even at the early hour of nine o'clock.

They were now adorning themselves for the occasion in the servants' quarters over the kitchen, while Phœbe, who was slightly deaf, swept and dusted and scrubbed behind the locked doors of the museum,

perfectly unconscious of all that was going on at the front of the house.

Charles, Tom, and Jimmy had retired to the freshly made beds, boots and all, while Alan and Sidney, with a long ladder abstracted from the barn, lolled at ease in the little summer-house in the garden. This was supposed to be the engine-house. The long garden-hose had already been attached to the hydrant for use in the great emergency which was to arise, and every preparation had been made for a gallant rescue. Jimmy's goat, Billy, harnessed to the cart, was tied to the arbor door, and was to act as a horse when the eventful moment arrived.

Suddenly a cry of "Fire !" rent the air. Alan and Sidney started to their feet and seized the ladder. It had been intended to carry the ladder while they drove Billy, thus to give the appearance at least of prancing horses. A large bell had been attached to the goat-cart to sound as the wagon moved, but after the manner of goats sometimes, Billy refused to stir.

Much valuable time was wasted in trying to persuade him, but to no avail. The fire-laddies were forced to give it up and go on foot to the house, which was supposed to be already half burned to the ground, while Billy was left to nibble Uncle Thad's precious rose-bushes, which were just within his reach.

Sidney and Alan caught up the hose and the ladder, and, heavily encumbered though they were, started at a brisk trot for the house. Arrived at the front, they found that the inhabitants had re-

sorted to extreme measures. Fearful of waiting longer for the engines to arrive, the boys in the third story had knotted the bedclothes together, and at that instant Charles was in the act of stepping from the window and was about to slide down the sheets and blankets, while Tom and Jimmy watched anxiously from within, uttering loud and terrified cries of "Fire! Fire!"

There was a small porch in front of the Wests' front door, the roof of which was on a level with the second-story windows, and was supported by tall, white-fluted columns, and this roof Charles intended to reach. The bedclothes, which were fastened to the four-post bedstead in the boys' room, did not extend as far as he had expected; consequently, his window being towards the side of the house and not directly over the porch, he found it impossible to swing himself over to the roof as he had hoped, and he could merely dangle in mid-air.

"Help! Hurry up!" he cried, in really agitated tones. "I can't swing over and it is too far to drop. I'll try to climb up again, but you had better run up the ladder!"

While all this commotion was reigning the two servants, who were going out, came around the side of the house.

"Lands sakes!" exclaimed one. "Whatever on earth's the matter? Fire! They're crying 'Fire!' Go call the engine while I go back and save our things."

Without stopping to investigate further the two separated; one disappeared within the house, while the other ran shrieking from the front gate.



In the meantime Charles had been rescued from his perilous position, and Alan again climbed the ladder, Sidney steadying it from below.

"It's your turn now, Jimmy," said Tom. "You slide down the rope and Alan will catch you."

"I can't, Tom! I'm afraid," said Jimmy, looking fearfully from the window at the line of bed-linen which was floating in the breeze.

"Oh, nonsense! Of course you can. Don't be a ninny, Jim! I never saw such a fellow; you're afraid of everything. I can't leave you here. Fire! Fire! Help! Hurry now!"

Thus incited, Jimmy projected himself through the window, assisted by Tom, who continued to shout with all the power of his lungs. Jimmy, feeling himself hanging in mid-air, was filled with terror.

"Help me, Alan!" he cried, as he slid down the sheet. "I'm falling!"

Just at that moment the sound of a clanging bell was heard, and up the quiet street rushed the Germantown fire-engine, followed almost immediately by the hook-and-ladder company and the insurance patrol. Neighbors ran to the scene of action, Mrs. Lee and the maids next door began to gather the valuables together, and wild consternation filled the hearts of all.

Jimmy, startled by the noise and excited by the sudden appearance of a real fire-engine, lost his hold and fell with a cry of terror to the ground.

What happened afterwards it is almost beyond the power of words to describe. Firemen rushed frantically into the house, looking in vain for smoke or flame;

neighbors asked questions and received no answers ; the boys, dismayed at the result of the game, tried with but poor success to explain ; and poor Jimmy, moaning with pain, lay on the ground in their midst.

Fortunately, Mr. Lee had not gone to Philadelphia, as usual, that day. He, Loraine, and Janet were on their way home from an early morning ride on their wheels when he passed his neighbors' house and saw the confusion and the crowd. Hurrying in, he picked up Jimmy and carried him to his own house, supposing, of course, that the Wests' house was on fire. Leaving Jimmy in Mrs. Lee's care, he ran back to the scene of the fire, only to find that it was all a hoax.

There was no fire and never had been any, and now the firemen were about to start for home, grumbling with anger and disappointment, and declaring that the Wests should be fined for ringing them up under false pretences. The boys, who on the whole were rather enjoying the experience, were somewhat startled when they heard this ; but as they had not given the alarm, and could not imagine who had done so, they felt that they could scarcely be held responsible.

In an incredibly short time the excitement was all over, and the crowd which had collected had dispersed to their homes ; and now it was found that poor little Jimmy, ever the unfortunate one of the family, was really a good deal hurt. His arm was broken, and Mrs. Lee had sent in haste for the nearest doctor.

Jimmy was put to bed in a dear little room next to Mrs. Lee's own, and, although he was in great pain, he found much to divert him in the pretty things

about him. After the doctor had come, and the painful operation of setting the arm was over, Jimmy lay quiet for a time. Mrs. Lee thought that he was asleep, and, after looking at him for a moment, was about to leave the room when the boy opened his eyes.

"Mrs. Lee," said he, in a weak voice that went to her heart, "wish I lived here!"

"Do you?" said she, smiling down at him; "I wish so, too."

"Only I'd want Uncle Thad and Alan and all the boys."

Then, after a pause:

"Mrs. Lee?"

"Yes, dear."

"Don't you think I might stay in this nice little bed while my arm is getting mended?"

"Of course you can! You mean you would like to make me a visit?"

"Yes, Mrs. Lee."

"So you shall. I will arrange it with your uncle as soon as he comes home."

Jimmy gave a sigh of content and closed his eyes. Presently he opened them again and fixed them upon his hostess—Jimmy had large, very round blue eyes.

"Oh, Mrs. Lee!"

"Yes, dear."

"If I make you a visit while my arm is getting mended, I shall want to see Uncle Thad and the boys every day."

"Certainly you shall."

"But what do you suppose Al will do about it?"

"What do you mean, dear?"

"Al doesn't like girls, you know. He's afraid of 'em. He'll be afraid to come in here."

Mrs. Lee laughed.

"Perhaps he will get over it. At any rate, I think we can arrange for him to come and see his little cousin without his being troubled by the girls. And now, dear, you must try to sleep."

"Very well," returned Jimmy, again sighing contentedly. "I'll try. I'm awfully glad I'm going to make you a visit, Mrs. Lee, only I must see Al every day." And then he fell asleep.

Loraine and Janet, as well as Ethel, who had also arrived upon the scene when the excitement was at its height, were, of course, greatly interested in all that had taken place; and when the crowd had gone and the house had regained its accustomed quiet, they stayed to hear a more detailed account of the game which had led to such sensational results.

Alan, being the eldest of the boys, had gone down to the engine-house to explain matters there, for they had now found out that one of the servants had asked a policeman to sound the alarm, believing that the house was really on fire. Sidney, Charles, and Tom, with the three girls, sat on the little porch in front of the house and talked matters over.

"I don't know what Uncle Thad and Uncle Simon will say," said Sidney. "Uncle Thad's flower-beds have been horribly trampled. We must fix them up for him. It is a good thing it was all on the front of the house, for if it hadn't been Uncle Simon would have been sure to think that his collections had been injured. Oh, by the way!"

He stopped abruptly, and looked at Janet.

"Yes, I know," said she; "I have been waiting for you to say something."

"Oh, I don't think you had better," interposed Loraine.

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked Charles, looking from one to the other with an air of mystification.

"I know," said Tom. "Janet is up to mischief."

"I should think enough mischief had been done for one day," said Charles.

"I think so, too, Janet," said Loraine, earnestly. "Really, you had better not attempt the other."

"Oh, now, you just hush!" replied Janet. "You know I am determined to see those collections, and so is Ethel. I don't mind the mischief part of it in the least. I have been in mischief ever since I was a baby" (which was quite true), "and I have always found it great fun. Sidney, you said you would help us, and you mustn't back out now."

"I have no intention of backing out—never had. Only I would mildly suggest that if you are going to try to get into the museum, now is your chance. Phoebe is down in the kitchen refreshing herself with a cup of tea after the excitement of the fire, and very likely in her agitation, when she thought the house was burning down, she left the door unlocked."

Janet and Ethel sprang to their feet.

"Why didn't you tell us this before?" they cried.

"Loraine, you must come with us."

"No, I am not going to," replied Loraine, decided-

ly. "I don't think we have any right to go into that room, and I am not going."

"Oh, you are afraid!" said Janet, supreme scorn showing itself in her voice.

"I'm not afraid at all," exclaimed Loraine, stung by this taunt; "but I do think we oughtn't to do it. If you think it is all right, why, then, go and do it, but for me it would be very wrong."

"Oh, don't stop to preach," retorted Janet, impatiently. "But I can't see where the harm is of three girls going quietly into that room and looking at those curiosities. We have never been forbidden to go. The boys have, and so, of course, it would be wrong for them to do it. Please, Loraine, come!"

Janet could be very persuasive when she chose, and when Ethel, who had been unusually quiet, added her voice, it was more than Loraine could withstand. Then, too, she wanted very much to see the collections; in fact, she was really quite as anxious to examine the contents of the glass cases, after her one glimpse of them the day she came to Germantown, as were Janet and Ethel themselves.

She hesitated, presented a few more arguments, which Janet and Ethel successfully combated, and then suffered herself to be led away.

The party proceeded up the stairs, headed by Sidney and followed by Charles and Tom, both of whom were in a state of excitement which knew no limit.

As Sidney had suspected, Phoebe had left the door unlocked, and the bunch of keys was hanging from the keyhole. He was almost tempted to go himself, in spite of his promise to Uncle Thad. It did seem

~~to talking~~
~~aggravating~~

to be so near and not see once more those interesting collections, but, fortunately for him, his strength of mind was not put to the test. Just as they had reached the door Mr. Lee, from without the house, called to the boys to come to him. He wished to consult with them about Jimmy, and not knowing which one he wanted, they all ran down and left the girls alone on the landing of the staircase.

"I'll come back and warn you if Phœbe is coming back," said Sidney, as he forsook them. "You had better be all ready to run the minute I do."

"I am not going in, girls," said Lorraine. "I don't think we ought to, really."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the others, in a whisper. "Don't back out now, when we are right on the threshold." While Janet added, "I had no idea you were such a coward, Lorraine!"

And so once more Lorraine yielded to this taunt, which, though unjust, was none the less impossible to bear, and suffered herself to be drawn into the room.

Once across the threshold, she forgot her previous misgivings, and gave herself up to a study of the interesting articles within the glass cases. Janet and Ethel flew about the room, glancing at everything and discovering one delight after another, but Lorraine, who was fond of investigating, examined each collection of curiosities more thoroughly.

There was one set of shelves which covered more than half the side of the room, and which were filled with china teapots. From these she could scarcely tear herself away. There were tall teapots and short

teapots, broad ones and slender ones, teapots with long noses and teapots with no noses at all.

Then there was the case of thimbles. Loraine, who was something of a needle-woman, hung over them longer than she knew, examining each one through the glass, from the dainty gold one which had belonged to Mr. Simon West's mother, to the funny, clumsy, leaden one with no top which he had found one day in the street, and which had first suggested to him the idea of collecting thimbles.

Suddenly the door of the room was hastily opened—it had been pushed to, but not entirely closed—and Sidney's voice was heard exclaiming :

“Run, girls! Hurry! Phoebe is coming up the back stairs!”

Janet and Ethel, who happened to be near the door, lost no time in escaping, and within three minutes were down the front stairs and out on the lawn, pursuing their way to the gate with their wheels as if they had been innocently riding all the morning, and had merely stopped for an instant to see the boys about something.

Loraine, however, was not so fortunate. She was in the back part of the room when the summons came. She ran towards the door, but her foot caught in the leg of a small cabinet and pulled it over with a crash. She fell and quickly jumped up again, but she found that escape was now impossible. She heard Phoebe's exclamation of wonder at the noise, while she questioned Sidney as to the cause of it. The three boys appeared to be loitering on the stairs.

Looking about in dismay at being thus caught, Lo-

raine spied a cupboard, the door of which stood ajar. Creeping in here—it was not more than three feet high—she pulled the door to and waited. If she had had a moment in which to think and to decide as to the best course, she would not have done this. She would have gone boldly out and confronted Phœbe. It would have been much the better plan in the end, but now there was no help for it. She could not make up her mind to crawl ignominiously forth from the cupboard, and, therefore, she must wait.

She heard Phœbe exclaim with surprise and horror when she saw the wrecked cabinet on the floor. She heard the clatter of broken glass or china as the woman examined the fragments of whatever it was that had been broken in the fall. She heard her mutter to herself :

“Alackaday ! Whatever is going to happen next ? Whatever will Mr. Simon say ? It’s sperrits as has done it, of that I’m certain sure, and they may be in the room yet. I’d best get out as fast as I can before they spring out and choke me. But Mr. Simon, what ’ll he say ? Whatever will he say ?”

Taking her broom and her dust-pan, she hurried away, and Loraine heard her close and lock the door.

Here was a pretty state of affairs. She was locked in, and would be forced to stay there until Mr. Simon West came home and discovered her !

CHAPTER V

LORAIN crept from her hiding-place, hoping to find some way of escape, and then paused, overcome with consternation at what she saw.

The cabinet, which was a small, open one, had been used for a collection of thermometers. Those on stands had filled the shelves, while others which were intended to hang had dangled from hooks on the outer edge of every shelf. Dozens (so it seemed) of these thermometers now lay in atoms upon the floor, while the mercury in little silver globules had rolled about in every direction.

Lorraine did not stop long to examine this havoc of which she had been the author, but ran to the windows to see if there were any chance of escape from them. Each one was barred with iron to guard against possible burglars. There was no hope there.

She tried the one door of the room, rattling the handle and even pressing against the door with her weight, as if she hoped to batter it down, but it was useless. There was nothing for her to do but sit here and wait for Uncle Simon to appear.

She wondered what time it was, and even as the thought passed through her mind the room was filled with the sound of striking clocks. There was a collection of them, and Mr. West kept them all carefully

wound. From the tall clock, which he had insisted upon moving up here from the hall, to the tiny one of Dresden china, for which he had given a fabulous sum at a jeweler's in Philadelphia, all were striking at once—the hour of eleven.

It was eleven o'clock, then, and she had heard one of the boys say that the uncles would be at home again in time for dinner at two. Three hours in which to wait! Would no one dare to come to her rescue in all that time?

Overcome with terror, mortification, and suspense, Loraine sat down on the floor near the door, and, burying her face in her handkerchief, began to cry. Was ever any one in a worse predicament? Oh, that she had never yielded to the girls' entreaties! She had felt from the first that it was a wrong thing to do. Indeed, she had known that it was. Oh, how foolish, how wicked she had been ever to consent to it!

And they had escaped, while she must suffer. They had done no harm, while she had injured other people's property. She wondered to what extent. What would her father be obliged to pay to atone for the mischief worked by his daughter? She had not the least idea of the cost of thermometers, and even if she had known, it would have been no help, for how could she tell how many thermometers had been broken? Hundreds, she should think, to judge from the fragments.

At this thought her sobs broke out afresh. She lay upon the floor, her face hidden in her arms, which were folded beneath it. So violent was her emotion that she did not hear the sound of a key which was

inserted in the lock, nor the turning of the door-handle. She was quite unconscious that she was no longer alone until she heard some one say :

“ Oh, look here ! Er—I say, don’t cry so ! ”

Loraine looked up in astonishment, which was increased tenfold when she found that Alan Ransford was in the room. She rose hastily to her feet, but she said nothing. She could merely stand and stare at him, for she had been crying so hard that she could not speak.

“ The door is open,” said Alan, and then turned crimson for having mentioned such a self-evident fact.

Still Loraine did not move.

“ Er—aren’t you coming ? ”

“ Ye-es ! ” murmured Loraine, making no effort to leave the room, however. “ Oh, I am so much obliged to you ! I—I—th—thought I should have to stay here till your uncle came home. It was t-too dreadful. Oh ! ” And again burying her face in her handkerchief her sobs broke out afresh, while she leaned against a glass case.

Alan was at a loss to know what to do. This simply confirmed him in his opinion that girls were the most extraordinary creatures that ever were made. Here was this one, who had apparently been crying her eyes out because she was shut up in a room from which there was no chance of escape. The chance had suddenly come, and instead of availing herself of it she remained in the room and continued to cry.

He was very much afraid that in her agitation she would lean too heavily on the case and break it, thus

adding to the harm which she had already done. He felt that he must warn her, must urge her to leave the room at once, but he could not find words in which to do it. It was a shame, he told himself, that he had been obliged to come. Sidney ought to have done it. Even if he (Alan) had more influence with Phœbe than the other boys, as they all said he had, that was no reason why he should have been forced to come up to the door.

It had all happened so quickly. He had just returned from his visit to the engine-house when the boys had rushed to him with the information that Loraine Lee was shut up in the museum and could not get out; that she had broken something there, for there had been a crash which Phœbe declared had been caused by spirits; that Phœbe had hurried away from the room, and now Alan must get the keys away from her.

He was her favorite among the boys, because he did not give her as much trouble as did the others, and also because he was particularly fond of a certain kind of "Dutch loaf" which Phœbe prided herself upon making to perfection.

"There is no use in my asking her for the keys," Sidney had argued. "It would only be a waste of time, for she wouldn't give them to me, and we must get Loraine out somehow. Why, Alan, it would be simply awful to have Uncle Simon come home and find her there!"

So Alan had finally yielded, and, by dint of praising the Dutch loaf and carrying a scuttleful of coal across the kitchen for Phœbe, had succeeded in inducing

her to give him the bunch of keys to look at. Then he had asked her if she did not want another cup of tea, and having thus diverted her mind had hastily departed in search of Sidney, intending to give him the keys.

To his utter astonishment he had not been able to find one of the boys. They had all disappeared as completely as though the earth had suddenly opened and swallowed them up. There had been nothing for him to do, therefore, but to come and unlock the door himself. He strongly suspected that this was a "put-up job," as he called it to himself. The boys thought it would be an excellent joke, probably, to make him do it. Well, if that was the case he would get even with them yet; but, in the meantime, how could he get the girl to move?

The uncles might come home by an earlier train—there was one which arrived at Germantown at just about this time. Desperation gave him courage, and, walking up to Loraine, he seized her—rather roughly, it must be confessed—by the elbow.

"See here!" said he, and his tone was by no means gentle, "are you going to stay here all night? If you are there was no use in my coming to unlock the door. I wish you would hurry. You will break that case if you don't look out."

Loraine raised her head. Indignation at being thus summarily treated dried her eyes at once, and gave her voice with which to speak.

"Certainly I am coming," said she. "I can't imagine why you should think that I'm not. I have no intention of breaking the case."

And with her head held very high in the air, and without another word of thanks to her rescuer, she walked out of the room.

“Humph!” said Alan to himself, looking after her, “just as I thought. She doesn’t appreciate it in the least. I wish I had left her here.”

And then he too departed from the room, and, closing the door with a bang, which caused all the glass cases to rattle and the mercury from the shattered thermometers to roll more widely about the room, he ran down the backstairs and tossed the bunch of keys to Phœbe. Then he went out, leaving Phœbe’s mind in a state of absolute confusion.

The alarm of fire, the disaster in the museum, and the fact that she had surrendered the keys even for a short time to one of the boys so much dreaded by Mr. Simon, added to the many cups of strong tea which she had drunk that morning, had reduced the old woman to a condition of nervousness from which it would take her some time to recover.

While all this was taking place at home, Mr. Thaddeus and Mr. Simon West were pursuing their separate ways about the streets of Philadelphia. They went together to the office of their lawyer and then to that of their broker, and when the business which they had in common had been finally transacted, Mr. Simon informed his brother, with an airy manner which did not in the least deceive the astute Thaddeus, that he should be obliged to leave him for a short time.

“I will meet you on the train, Thaddeus—the one-o’clock train. If you wish to go out earlier, don’t

hesitate to do it—don't hesitate, I beg of you. I—I am going up-town to—in fact—well, I am going to see some one on business—some one who would not interest you in the least, my dear Thaddeus.”

Now it happened that Mr. Thaddeus had also a little private business of his own to transact, for which he had been secretly hoping that Simon would give him an opportunity ; therefore, he offered no objections to this suggestion, but, on the contrary, consented to part with his brother with an alacrity that was almost suspicious.

“Very well,” said he, “Simon, I am agreed. We old fellows don't often get to town, do we ? And when we do we must make the most of it. The one-o'clock train, then, Simon. I have a hat to get, and—and—oh, well, a number of little things to attend to.”

“There is my car,” interposed Simon, and he hurried away.

“I wonder where Simon is bound for,” said Thaddeus to himself as he stood on the corner and watched his portly brother board the trolley-car and disappear within. “An up-town car. After some trash for his museum, I suppose. In fact, I'll be bound it's that. What is it now ? Umbrellas or stuffed birds ? I declare I forget, but I hope he won't spend all the money he drew out of the bank to-day. It seemed like a large amount, but I suppose I ought not to say anything, as I drew out quite a slice myself—quite a slice. I only hope Simon didn't see it.”

He left the corner and walked down Chestnut Street.

"And now to get some presents for the boys, and for little Loraine, too, I think. Yes, I must get something for little Loraine, and it won't do to leave out the young girl from Massachusetts. No, no; she mustn't be left out. And, if I have any money left, I'll just take a look at some of the old books at Leary's. They may have found that first edition of the 'Compleat Angler' I asked them to look up."

"I wonder what Thaddeus is planning to do," thought Mr. Simon, as he was being swiftly borne towards No. 1503 North Cranberry Street, which he had carefully hunted out in the Directory at the lawyer's office while Thaddeus was engaged in pleasant conversation—"I wonder what he is planning to do. It was unfortunate that my car came along before I could find out. He seemed to be drawing out a large sum of money from the bank. I only hope he is not going to spend it on boys or books or what not. I am afraid he is extravagant. Strange that Thaddeus and I are so totally unlike—totally unlike. No one would ever suppose that we were brothers. Dear me, I hope nobody has got ahead of me with that cane. I must have it! That is all that there is to be said about it. I must have it!"

And from that moment Thaddeus, the boys, and the books were dismissed from his mind, and he again gave himself up to entertaining dreams of the gold-headed walking stick.

Promptly at ten minutes of one the brothers again met. It was at the gate, which had not yet been opened to allow passengers to pass through to the train, that Simon, leaning upon his newly purchased

treasure, was suddenly banged upon his elephantine shoulder by a man so laden with packages that he could scarcely walk without endangering his fellow-citizens.

"What's that?" asked Simon, sharply, turning about in wrath.

"I beg pardon, sir," said a familiar voice, politely ; "the truth is— Why, Simon, is that you?"

"Yes, Thaddeus, it is I, and I should really like to know what you are doing with all those bundles! Do you know that you nearly knocked me down?"

"Simon, my dear fellow, I beg your pardon! If I could knock you down I should consider myself strong indeed."

"But what are all those packages?" persisted his brother.

"Oh, well, a hat and—and—one or two other things."

"A hat!" exclaimed Simon. "It was no hat that hit me on the shoulder. If it was, it must have been knocked into a cocked hat!"

"Very good—very good, indeed!" laughed Mr. Thaddeus. "My dear Simon, you grow brighter every year of your life!"

Sly Mr. Thaddeus, who thought thus by a little harmless flattery to divert his brother's mind from the really appalling array of purchases which he had made. Fortunately for his purpose, the gate was at that moment opened and the passengers began to crowd through to the train, so further investigation on the part of Simon was for the time impossible.

When they had taken their places in the car he was

so absorbed in contemplation of his cane and of something else which he had bought that he forgot to pursue the subject.

The brothers occupied separate seats, Mr. Thaddeus with his packages spread out beside him, and Mr. Simon sitting behind, which position he had carefully chosen that the glittering cane-head might escape his brother's eye for a short time at least.

Mr. Thaddeus glanced behind in a casual manner after a few moments, and seeing that his brother was thinking of something else and was not looking at him at all, he quietly chose one of the packages and, removing the wrapper as carefully and as noiselessly as possible, examined with eagerness the ancient-looking book which lay within.

"The genuine thing !" said he to himself. "I knew it the moment I clapped eyes on it." And presently he had begun to read, and was oblivious to everything which might take place.

Very shortly Simon peeped over the back of his brother's seat. Seeing that he was so absorbed, he leaned back with a sigh of satisfaction and thrust his hand first into one pocket, then into another. At last he found the article for which he was looking. He drew forth a small leather case.

Again peering over at Thaddeus, and convinced that he was still too much preoccupied to notice him, he touched a spring and the case flew open. Within lay a massive gold ring, so large that it must have been originally intended for the thumb of a savage, and so hideous in design that even the savage must have discarded it in disgust.

This ring Mr. Simon devoured with his eyes for fully five minutes. Then he snapped to the lid and put the case back in his pocket.

"I shall give up walking-sticks," said he to himself, "now that I have completed my collection with this valuable gold-headed one, and turn my attention to finger-rings. Strange that I have never thought of them before ! If I had not chanced to see this one at the pawnbroker's shop where I found the cane, it would never have occurred to me to collect them at all. Strange what small occurrences lead to large results."

In this Mr. Simon West spoke more wisely than he knew.

It was just at this moment that a lady who was sitting directly across the aisle from Mr. Simon leaned forward and addressed him.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said she ; "but—you may think it strange—I don't know, but I have never been here before, and as Mr. Grafton used to say—Mr. Grafton was my husband and, poor man, has been dead these many years ; it was pneumonia and happened so suddenly, but, after all, such things always do come suddenly—but, as I was saying, can you tell me whether the next station is Tulpehocken?"

"Tulpehocken, madam, is the station after the next stop, and will not be reached for some few minutes yet," returned Mr. Simon. "I shall be happy to tell you, madam, when we get there, as I leave the train then myself."

"Now, do you really ? That is a coincidence ; but then coincidences are so apt to happen, as Mr. Graf-

ton, my late husband, used often to say. I wonder, now, if you happen to know my cousins that I am on my way to visit? My cousins, I call them, though they are not very near cousins, but as Mr. Grafton, my late husband, used to say, 'Blood is thicker than water,' and I always call them 'cousin,' and so it amounts to the same thing. Though he may have said, 'Blood will tell,' in fact, I'm not quite sure which it was. But they don't know I'm coming, and so they won't be expecting me. I haven't the least idea how to find the house, so if you could tell me where they live it would be of real assistance to me."

"I should be most happy, madam, to assist you in any manner whatever, but you have not told me the name of your cousins." This with Mr. Simon's most gallant air.

"To be sure," murmured the lady. "Mr. Grafton, my late husband, always said I was so apt to forget the most important part—not that a name *is* the most important part; no, not by any means. Shakespeare says, you know, 'What is in a name?'"

"Tulpehocken! Tulpehocken!" shouted the conductor and the brakeman from either end of the car.

The lady and the brothers West started to their feet. While Mr. Thaddeus picked up his packages, Mr. Simon clutched his cane with one hand and possessed himself of the lady's large leather bag with the other.

Still ignorant as to whom she wished to find, and still further unconscious of the terrible developments which awaited them at home, Mr. Thaddeus and Mr. Simon West stepped from the train, and then turned to help the lady to alight.

As she put out her hand, from which she had removed her glove, for Mr. Simon to support, his eye was attracted by a large ring which gleamed upon her first finger. It seemed to be formed of an amethyst set in silver.

“What an excellent addition that ring would be to my new collection!” thought he. “And what, madam, is the name of your cousins?” he asked, aloud.

“Their name is Lee,” she replied.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Loraine left the Wests' house she did not go directly home. She could not yet make up her mind to tell her father and mother what had happened. Then, too, she wished to see Janet Franklin and Ethel Foster, her companions in mischief. She longed for sympathy from those who would be so well fitted to give it, those who had urged her to join them in an escapade which had led to such dire results.

She ran down to the gate where her wheel had been left, and, mounting it, she rode quickly around the corner to Mrs. Gordon's. It was a hot day, but the tall, thick trees which shaded the road kept the summer sun from blazing too fiercely on Loraine's uncovered head. Her hat had been discarded long ago, and where she had left it she did not know; in fact, she had quite forgotten that there were in the world such superfluous articles as hats.

She found Janet playing with the baby, who was lying in his coach, and who had just waked up from his morning nap.

"Oh, you dear, cunning sing!" Janet was saying, as Loraine, with tear-stained face and generally ruffled appearance, came up the little path. "You are the sweetest creature! Hello, Loraine, did you get out,

after all ? I was afraid you were caught there ! Did Phoebe find you, and is she going to tell ? I haven't dared go back to ask the boys, once I got safely away. Ethel met her aunt, and she has gone home with her to Chestnut Hill for the rest of the day. It was fun, wasn't it ? Come to your aunt Janet, baby ! Oh, you sweet, itty sing !"

"It wasn't a bit of fun," replied Loraine. "You and Ethel got off very well, but I—oh, Janet, I have done the most terrible thing !"

"What ?" asked Janet, continuing to hold out her arms to her nephew, and to make the various gesticulations and sounds that people are apt to indulge in when they converse with infants.

"Janet, you must listen ! I upset a cabinet and broke I don't know how many thermometers !"

In reply to this startling information Janet only laughed. Apparently it seemed to her the best joke in the world.

"Oh, listen to that, baby !" she cried ; "she broke a lot of thermometers, so she did ! You wouldn't break thermometers, would you, you itty, cunning sing ?"

Now every one knows that when one is looking for compassion and consolation, it is somewhat provoking to have one's friend "talk baby-talk" to babies, no matter how charming the recipient of those endearments may be. Loraine's tears, very near the surface that morning, again began to flow, and she buried her face once more in her already well-soaked pocket-handkerchief.

"What are you crying about ?" asked Janet, great-

ly astonished. "You wouldn't cry about thermometers, you itty, cunning sing, would you? Why, Loraine, what a baby you are!"

"What is the matter with Loraine?" asked a gay voice, as Mrs. Gordon stepped out on to the piazza. "Why, Loraine, you poor child, come right here to me and tell me all about it!"

Kind-hearted Cynthia put her arm around the girl's waist and drew her to a bench.

"Oh, Mrs. Gordon," sobbed Loraine, "I'm so sorry to cry! I—I feel like Fleda in 'Queechy.' Sh-she was always b-bursting into tears, and I have been b-bursting all the morning! But if you had broken hundreds of thermometers, wouldn't you cry?"

"Hundreds of thermometers!" repeated Mrs. Gordon. "Child, what do you mean?"

"Hasn't Janet told you where we have been?"

"Not a word! Now, Janet, have you been in mischief, as usual?" cried Cynthia, looking at her sister with severity.

"Of course not!" replied Janet. "I haven't done a particle of harm."

"You haven't done any yourself," said Loraine, "but you persuaded me to go, and I was unfortunate."

"I haven't the least doubt of it," said Mrs. Gordon; "that is just like Janet. But tell me where you have been."

"In Mr. Simon West's museum."

"And you have broken something?"

"Loads and loads of thermometers."

"Why, girls!"

"Don't count me in with it," said Janet. "I didn't break them."

"But, Janet," exclaimed Loraine, with some heat, "I know you didn't actually break them, but I never would have gone into the place if it had not been for you and Ethel. You know I didn't want to go at all, and you made me."

"You shouldn't have been so weak-minded," said Janet, perversely; "you gave in as easily as possible. I was quite surprised when I found you were actually going."

Loraine was speechless. She had looked for commiseration and received only criticism.

"I have no doubt that Janet did overpersuade you," said Mrs. Gordon, "and if any harm was done I have no doubt that she was equally responsible."

"Cynthia, how absurd you are! I didn't do a particle of harm. What are you going to do about it, Loraine? Are you going to confess?"

"I suppose so."

"Does any one know you were there besides the boys?"

"I don't know."

"Who let you out?"

"Alan Ransford."

"Did he, really? Loraine, do tell me about it!"

"There is nothing to tell."

"Oh, come now, don't be so grumpy!"

"I am not grumpy, but I do think you are the meanest girl I ever knew. I am going home now. Good-bye, Mrs. Gordon."

"Loraine, dear," said Cynthia, "I can't bear to

have you go off feeling so badly. Janet will come around," she whispered, as she walked to the gate with Loraine. "I will talk to her. She is only pretending to be so indifferent. I know her well and I can manage her. You mustn't mind. And now, what are you going to do?"

"I am going home to tell father and mother about it," said Loraine, "and as soon as Mr. West comes home I suppose I have ~~got~~ to go in next door and tell him. Oh, dear, it is too dreadful! Good-bye, dear Mrs. Gordon. You are so sweet and good to me!"

And kissing her kind hostess affectionately, Loraine once more mounted her wheel and rode away.

When she reached home she found that her father was not there, and that her mother was engaged with visitors in the parlor. Warm though the day was, some ladies had driven down from Chestnut Hill to see Mrs. Lee, and were at present being refreshed with cake and lemonade. Probably they would not take their departure for some time to come.

Loraine wandered up-stairs. She would go and see how Jimmy was doing, she said to herself; but when she peeped in at the half-open door she found that Alan was there and was reading to him. She did not go in, therefore, but went to her own room and sat down by the window, from which she could watch the Wests' house on the other side of the hedge. She would see the brothers return, and then—and then—further than that she dared not think.

She felt very angry with Janet. It did seem most ungenerous and unjust for her not to shoulder at least a portion of the responsibility. It was unfortunate

that Ethel should have gone away for the day. Loraine was quite confident that she would have been more reliable. She knew that Ethel was too high-minded not to be willing to take her share of the censure which was due them, for she had heard her speak often on that and kindred subjects, and she knew what her views of honor were.

Loraine wondered what the boys would say. She felt sure that they would agree with her about Janet, and it comforted her not a little to think that Janet would certainly be thought of with some scorn and disapproval, even if no one ventured to tell her so.

Loraine had been sitting there perhaps half an hour, perhaps an hour, when she heard a carriage drive up to their own front door. She thought it must be that of the callers, who were probably taking their leave; but presently the carriage came into sight on its way to the other gate, and she saw that it was one from the station which people who arrived on the trains were in the habit of hiring when they wished to be driven home.

Wondering who had come, and her mind diverted by her curiosity on the subject, she forgot for the moment the tragic events of the morning and ran down-stairs. There she found such a gathering of people and so much conversation that it almost seemed like an afternoon tea. There were the three ladies from Chestnut Hill, who were bidding good-bye, and the two Mr. Wests—Loraine's heart, lightened for the moment of its load, again grew heavy—and a lady whom she had never seen before, who was kissing her mother and talking away to her at the top of

her voice, and so fast that Loraine's tongue ached in sympathy.

Mrs. Lee was apparently telling the uncles of Jimmy's accident, for Loraine heard her say that nothing would give her greater pleasure than to keep the boy with her until he recovered. Mr. Thaddeus demurred, but Mr. Simon seemed disposed to accept the offer. They were asking all manner of questions as to the cause of the accident, but Mrs. Lee told them that the boys would explain everything, she was sure. All that she desired was to have the privilege of keeping Jimmy.

So it was finally arranged, and then Mr. Thaddeus went up to see the little invalid and Mr. Simon departed to his own home after bidding the strange lady a courtly farewell. His impatience to return was plainly visible. Mr. Thaddeus also was anxious to reach there. He was averse to leaving his packages, which had been sent home by the hack-driver, exposed to the onslaught of Simon's curiosity, but he would not have gone without a word with Jimmy for the world. He ran up-stairs as briskly as one of the boys would have done, while Mr. Simon marched homeward with as much stateliness as his short, stout figure was capable of assuming.

Loraine's heart sank further still when she saw him walk away, with the funny short step which was peculiar to him. Within five minutes, she told herself, all would be discovered!

"And this is my daughter, Cousin Evelina," said Mrs. Lee, turning to the stranger and taking Loraine by the hand—"this is Loraine. You have often heard

me speak of our cousin Evelina Grafton, Loraine. You know she is the sister of Cousin Deborah, to whom we are indebted for this lovely house."

"That is just the reason I came," said Mrs. Grafton—"because Deborah left you the house. Not that she hadn't a perfect right to do it—dear no! for, as I often said to my late husband, Mr. Grafton—poor, dear Mr. Grafton! I am going to pay you a good long visit, Helen, so that I shall have plenty of time to tell you all about him. He did have such good sense! Not that I haven't just as much, but— Oh, as I was saying, Deborah always was peculiar. The very fact of her leaving this house to you—not that I am not very glad she did leave it to you, but, as long as I am her sister, I feel that I have a perfect right to—"

"My dear cousin," interposed Mrs. Lee, "we are delighted to have you come and stay as long as you like. Won't you come up now to your room? I am only sorry that I did not know you were coming, so that we might have had things more in order. Loraine, take the bag. Your trunks, you say, are at the station. We will send for them at once, Cousin Evelina."

Just as Mrs. Lee said this the ladies happened to be passing the parrot's cage, which hung in the hall. Hearing the sound of her own name, Evelina began to sing, in her own inimitable fashion,

"Dear Ev-e-leen-a, sweet Ev-e-leen-a,
My love for you can nev-er, never die!"

Mrs. Grafton started. "Mercy on us!" she exclaimed; "who is that? A parrot?"

"Yes ; and her name is Evelina," said Mrs. Lee, doubtful as to what effect this would have upon her relative. But her fears proved to be groundless.

"Well, I am flattered !" cried Mrs. Grafton. "Named for me ? That was nice of you, my dear Helen. Of course I could not have expected you to name your daughter after me, but, I declare, a bird is almost as good. Quite the same thing, in fact. And there is everything in a name. As I remarked to that good stout gentleman who was so polite on the train—an immense weight, Helen ; it must be three hundred pounds at least, but he carries it well—there is everything in a name. No, I think I said, 'What's in a name ?' But, after all, it doesn't make much difference which way I said it, for, as my late husband, Mr. Grafton, used frequently to say, it doesn't make the least difference a hundred years hence. I think that is what he used to say, but Mr. Grafton, though on the whole rather a silent man, used to say so much that was wise that I have really forgotten what he did and what he didn't say. You have heard that it was pneumonia, haven't you ? Removed from me in three days, and I a widow !" And she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

Meanwhile Mr. Simon West went home. He walked up the path from the gate to the house, flourishing his gold-headed walking-stick, and quite unconscious that he was being eagerly watched by four pairs of eyes which belonged to four boys who were hidden behind the various bushes on the lawn.

Mr. Simon did not notice the trampled flower-beds ; such things did not concern him, for he left all care

of the place to Thaddeus. Neither did he remark upon the drenched appearance of the path which encircled the house, where the hose had been allowed to play for an hour that morning during the excitement of the pretended fire.

With his mind intent upon one thing only, his desire to reach again the seclusion of his beloved museum, there to deposit the treasures procured that morning, he entered the house and rang the bell which would summon Phœbe to his presence.

Almost immediately Phœbe came, and, although she held the corner of her apron to her eyes, it did not serve to hide her flushed face and generally excited appearance. She was a small woman, with a thin, anxious countenance, and a small knob of hair on the extreme back of her head, which was so tightly wound and pinned into place that in looking at it one felt one's own hair ache in sympathy.

"My keys, Phœbe!" commanded Mr. Simon, in majestic tones.

For answer Phœbe only sobbed.

"My keys, Phœbe!" repeated Mr. West.

Again only a sob, and a feeble "Oh, Mr. Simon!"

"Phœbe, what does this mean?" fairly thundered he. "Why do you not produce my keys?"

"Oh, Mr. Simon!" wailed the hapless Phœbe, "it's sperrits as has been there; of that I am certain sure. Don't lay it to me, Mr. Simon, dear! Only say you won't lay it to me!"

"What do you mean?" demanded the master. "Has anything happened in my museum?"

"Oh, Mr. Simon!"

“Will you or will you not give me the keys?”

At this Phœbe held out a trembling hand, in which was the bunch of keys. Taking them—in fact, fairly grabbing them—Mr. West turned to mount the stairs. He paid no heed to Thaddeus’s packages strewn over the hall-table; he forgot even to remove his hat. Up the stairs he marched, but when he reached the top he turned upon the frightened Phœbe, who was following at a respectful distance, and who continued to wipe her eyes.

“Have these keys been out of your possession for an instant to-day?”

“No, sir—that is, yes, sir; at least, I think so.”

“Whom did you give them to?”

There was a moment’s silence, during which the four boys, who had crept into the house behind their uncle and quite unknown to him, listened breathlessly for her reply.

“Whom did you give them to?” repeated Mr. West.

“I think, sir, it was to Mr. Alan.”

Mr. Simon gave a sound of anger, which might have been translated into “I thought as much!” Alan was the one among the boys to whom he was the least partial. He did not actually dislike him, but Alan was the last comer, and Uncle Simon had been of the opinion that there were enough there already without adding to the number of nephews in the house.

He thrust the key into the lock, and, turning it with an abrupt click, he opened the door. At first glance nothing unusual could be seen. The rows of glass cases stood apparently just as he had left them. The

glass doors of the shelves which lined the walls appeared to be still whole, and the teapots, vases, clocks, cups and saucers, plates, pitchers, and what not, still stood in a state of preservation for which he had feared to hope. The windows were raised, and the summer breeze which stirred the awnings without swept through the room when the door was opened, and made the Japanese umbrellas which hung from the ceiling sway gently to and fro.

At first sight the room presented an appearance of peacefulness which was most reassuring. Mr. Simon had made up his mind that upon opening the door he would find all that he owned in a state of ruin ; therefore his relief was very great, but he did not think it would be well to show this to Phœbe. She should be severely reprimanded for having allowed the keys to go out of her possession, and also for having given him such a needless fright.

“You should not have given the keys to any one, Phœbe,” said he ; “least of all to one of those mischievous boys. It is only by sheer good luck that they haven’t destroyed everything in the room.”

“But you’ll forgive me, Mr. Simon !” cried Phœbe, secretly much astonished at this unlooked-for mildness. “You’ll forgive me, and you’ll forgive Mr. Alan. Indeed, I can’t think it was him as done it. I think ’twas sperrits ; indeed I do, Mr. Simon ! For I think, only I can’t be quite sure—what with the fire and everything—whether it was before or after Mr. Alan took the keys that the thermom-eters got broke.”

“Thermometers !” exclaimed Mr. Simon, turning,

for him, quite pale. "Not my precious thermometers! You don't mean to tell me—"

He did not stop to say more, but darted, if such a portly person could be said to dart, towards the back of the room where the cabinet of thermometers had stood, a spot which was not visible when one first entered the door. Had he been mistaken? Had something been broken, after all?

Alas, it was but too true! There, on the floor, lay the overturned shelves; there lay innumerable thermometers in every stage of destruction; there, in fact, was a scene of ruin which, after his moment of relief, seemed all the more appalling.

Mr. West tried to speak, but the words were not forthcoming. All the blood in his body seemed to rush to his head, and he felt for a moment or two quite giddy and confused. He leaned so heavily on the top of a case that the huge piece of glass cracked under his weight, and fell in with a clatter on the fans which were spread out beneath. This additional catastrophe served to restore him.

"More breakages!" he murmured; "another disaster! It will not do for me to give way to my feelings. I—I shall be having a stroke."

He put his hand to his head and struggled to calm himself. He was so successful in this effort that he was soon able to turn to the terrified Phœbe and question her more closely, in a voice of such unusual gentleness that its very strangeness frightened her still further.

"Phœbe," said he, "tell me all you know of this accident. Did you do it yourself?"

"No, Mr. Simon, that I didn't. I swept and dusted here just as usual," replied Phœbe, with great earnestness, "and not a thing got broke, and everything as neat as a pin. The glass cases was a-shining, and so was the windies, till you could 'a' seen your face in 'em as clear as a bell. Well, I was just finishing up when the house got afire."

"The house!" cried Mr. Simon, startled out of his assumed calm. "You don't mean to tell me the house was on fire!"

"That I do, Mr. Simon. Oh, sir, it's been an awful morning. What with the fire and the thermometers, and everything else! Well, it all happened after that. Mr. Alan, he come for the keys, and afterwards I found these all broke. No, I can't exactly say, neither, whether I found 'em broke before he come for the keys or afterwards. All I know is I found 'em broke some time, and I said then, and I say now, 'twas sperrits as done it; and then when I was sipping a cup of weak tea—for I was that flustered I needed something to bring me up, Mr. Simon, I did, indeed—why, just then Mr. Alan he come along, and somehow or other he got me to give him the keys, and then later he brung 'em back. And I hope you won't mind my drinking the tea, Mr. Simon, for what with the fire and the—"

"Tea! What is tea to me, woman?" thundered Mr. Simon West, his enforced calmness again deserting him. "What is tea to me, compared with the destruction of all these valuable thermometers? What, I say, is tea?"

"I don't know, Mr. Simon," whimpered Phœbe,

resorting again to the corner of her apron, which had been enjoying a temporary respite from active service ; "I couldn't really tell you."

"I shouldn't think you could. Where is my brother ? And where is Alan Ransford, who, in return for the home which we have given him, wilfully destroys the property of his nearest relative ? Where, I say, is Alan Ransford ?"

"I don't know, Mr. Simon."

"Then go and find out, and send him to me at once. Or, stay, I will go myself. Not one of those boys shall enter this place during my lifetime."

Waving to Phœbe to leave the room, Mr. Simon West turned and gave one more look at the fragments on the floor. Then he walked to the door. He went out, closed, and locked it behind him, and, putting the keys into his safest pocket, he descended the stairs.

He found that Thaddeus had returned, and, with the four boys surrounding him, had begun to open his packages.

CHAPTER VII

“UNCLE THAD, did you really get me this dandy football? Whew! it’s a regular daisy!” exclaimed Sidney, as he examined with pride the gift which his uncle had bestowed upon him. “It doesn’t seem, though, as if we ought to have these nice things when we have been doing such a lot of mischief this morning.”

“Have you, Sidney? Now, I’m right sorry to hear that. Tom, this is the best racket they had at Spalding’s. They said you’d like it. What mischief, Sidney? Is that the way Jimmy got hurt? I shall want to hear all about it after dinner, but not till then, not till then, please. Alan, here is the new saddle for your wheel I heard you wishing for the other day. How do you like it, eh?”

“Thaddeus!” said a voice from the stairs, which made them all start with a guilty sense of being caught—“Thaddeus, if you must waste your money in this nonsense, I beg that you will at least have the goodness to omit Alan. At least do me the justice to leave him out. He deserves to be driven from the house, I declare! He—he has broken—”

Mr. Simon West’s powers of speech deserted him for the moment. He stood on one of the lower stairs and glared at the group before him, his eyes for once being on a level with those of his tall brother.

"My dear Simon, what is the matter? Has anything gone wrong?" cried Thaddeus, looking in consternation first at him and then from one to the other of the nephews.

"Is that the mischief, boys? Have you broken something of your uncle Simon's?"

"Indeed we haven't," began Tom, eagerly; "it wasn't any of us, it was—" but he was silenced by his cousin, who, to Tom's utter astonishment, clapped his hand over the smaller boy's open mouth.

"Don't give it away," muttered Alan.

"There!" cried Mr. Simon. "See him trying to hide it! It is of no use, sir—no use. And you are only adding to your wrong-doing by teaching your young cousin to deceive. Quite right, Tom, for you to try to tell me that it was Alan. Quite right, and I shall not forget it. Thaddeus, I wish you would listen to me."

"I am listening, my dear Simon. Who could help listening? I am only distressed that my boys—"

"Distressed!" shouted Simon—"distressed! I am furious; in fact, I never was so angry in my life! I—I—"

After giving this bit of superfluous information, Mr. Simon's feelings so far overcame him that he was obliged to sit down on the stairs, which was unfortunate, for one can be much more imposing when one is standing than when one is seated, particularly if the seat is on a staircase. However, there was no help for it, so Mr. Simon sat down and continued his speech.

"That boy, Alan Ransford," said he, emphasizing

his remarks by pointing a stout finger of scorn at his nephew—"that boy, I say, will come to no good end. He has taken advantage of our absence to steal my keys from Phœbe, enter my museum, and break, smash, crash into a thousand atoms my THERMOMETERS!! Now, sir, what have you to say for yourself?"

"Simply that I didn't do it," said Alan.

"What!" roared Uncle Simon. "Then, who did?"

"I shall not tell you."

Mr. Simon grew purple. "You will not tell me?" repeated he.

"No, sir, I will not tell you."

"Wh-what do you mean by this impertinence?" blustered Mr. West. "I *know* you did it! I have Phœbe's word for it. I—I—"

"If you choose to believe Phœbe's word instead of mine you are welcome to do so," said Alan.

"My dear boys, what does all this mean?" asked Uncle Thaddeus, as soon as he could get a chance to speak. "What has been happening here, and how is it that any one of you went into the museum when you have each given me your promise that you would never attempt it?"

"We didn't go in, Uncle Thad," exclaimed Sidney, "and the only reason Alan was there was because—" But, like Tom, Sidney was stopped by a warning hand which was laid across his mouth.

"Don't say any more, Sid!" said Alan.

To have this happen a second time was almost more than his uncle Simon could endure. He tried to rise, but the stair was so low and he was so stout that it was impossible to do so without help, and he was

forced to submit to the ignominy of having one hand grasped by his brother Thaddeus and the other by Sidney and being fairly hauled to his feet.

"I declare, it is infamous!" he gasped, overcome by the effort and with fury—"perfectly infamous! The other boys wish to tell and Alan will not let them! Thaddeus, will you oblige me by interfering?"

"I will, Simon," replied his brother; "and I think the best thing for us all to do is to have dinner, which I feel sure is ready, and after dinner the boys will come to me in the library and give me an account of the morning."

To this Mr. Simon gave an unwilling assent. He wanted his dinner, but he felt that it was entirely too much of a concession to allow Alan to have his. However, there appeared to be no help for it, and on the whole, perhaps, it was a good plan to defer further discussion until the pangs of hunger had been satisfied; so the two uncles and their nephews took their places at the table, and, amid an almost unbroken silence, the meal was eaten.

It was about half over when Simon suddenly thought himself of the other startling event of the morning, which he had almost forgotten. He laid down his knife and fork. "I declare, Thaddeus," said he, "they are keeping something else from us. Did you know that the house was on fire this morning?"

Immediately there came a chorus from the hitherto speechless boys: "It wasn't really, Uncle Simon. It was only a false alarm."

"That was all, my dear brother," added Thaddeus. "I heard about it next door."

Mr. Simon glared upon the company at large, and then devoted himself once more to his dinner.

When it was over Mr. Thaddeus rose. "Now," said he, "I think it would be well to have a half-hour of quiet for the processes of digestion. At the end of that time I wish the four boys to come to me in the library. Simon, you will do as you like about joining us."

"Of course I shall do as I like," snapped Mr. Simon, who never was known to vary from his daily habit of napping for at least an hour after dinner. "I shall depend upon you, Thaddeus, to find out the truth. All I have to say is, that whoever broke those thermometers is responsible for their value. Do you hear, Alan? If you broke them—and I know you did, sir!—you shall pay for them. Do you hear me, I say?"

"Yes, sir, I hear you," returned Alan, very quietly, though the blood mounted to his face as he spoke.

The two uncles left the room, and the boys betook themselves to the barn, there to pass the designated half-hour and to talk things over.

The Messrs. West kept neither horses nor cows, and the barn, which was a large one, had been fitted up by the boys for a workshop, study, in fact, for their own private apartment, whither they could always repair when they wished and in which they were allowed undisputed sway. The large open space in the centre was common property, and was furnished with a somewhat unsteady table, upon which were various books, illustrated papers, and magazines; several chairs in different stages of decrepitude, but which

were none the less comfortable for that reason in the opinion of their owners, and a work-bench which was well supplied with carpenters' tools.

Charlie was a good deal of a mechanic, and his uncle Thaddeus had given him almost everything that he wanted to help him in his little inventions. The truth was that Uncle Thaddeus was quite confident that Charles was a genius, and he indulged him accordingly.

In addition to this common sitting-room each boy had taken possession of a stall, where he kept his own particular possessions. The name of the owner of the stall was posted in large letters above it, and it was considered a breach of etiquette for any one of them to enter the stall of another unless by special invitation.

It was rather interesting to note the differences in the five little dens, and Uncle Thaddeus, who was a welcome visitor in all, was never tired of joking about it.

Alan's was devoted to guns and fishing-tackle, "bicycle sundries," and bats and balls, while Sidney's, although it had a fair allowance of these articles, was decorated with colored ribbons and with pictures painted by some of his girl friends. A very feminine handkerchief was pinned above a tennis racket, and a Liberty scarf, which once was pink but was now faded and dusty, was festooned about a cricket-bat.

Charlie's sanctum was filled with the results of his mechanical efforts, while Tom's and Jimmy's held a heterogeneous collection of articles too varied to describe.

"What are you going to do about it, Al?" asked Sidney, as the boys retired to this sitting-room of theirs to stay until it was time to go to their uncle Thaddeus. "Aren't you going to tell even Uncle Thad that Loraine did it?"

"No," said Alan, "of course I am not going to give her away. Why, you wouldn't, Sid!"

"No, I know I wouldn't; but then I thought—that is, I wouldn't because she is a girl, and I like girls, but you always say you don't like them."

"That's no reason for being mean," returned Alan.

"I know I don't like them, and I think it was utterly nonsensical for those girls to get into the museum this morning, anyway; but as long as they did, and Loraine got caught, I am not going to be the one to give her away to Uncle Simon. Let her come over and tell him herself. Of course she won't do that, though. Catch a girl doing that!"

"I am not so sure," remarked Sidney, who was stretched out in the old steamer-chair and gazing meditatively at the ceiling. "I'm not so sure," he repeated.

"Oh, come now, of course she won't! If she were going to tell she would have been here before this."

"I don't know," said Sidney. "I think Loraine Lee is a pretty plucky girl, and she is a thoroughly honest one. About Janet Franklin and Ethel Foster I am not so sure. After all, it was their fault that Loraine got into the scrape, and they are the ones who ought to own up the whole thing. I doubt if they do—at least, I doubt if Ethel Foster does."

"So do I," said Alan, "and I also doubt very much

if Loraine Lee does. You mark my words! When she finds that Uncle Simon thinks that I broke those confounded old thermometers she will let it go. Well, *I* sha'n't set him right. As far as I am concerned I don't mind his thinking that I've smashed every blessed thing in his whole collection, as long as I know I didn't, and as long as Uncle Thad believes me."

"And you don't want us to tell either, Al?" asked Tom, who with Charles had been an attentive listener to this conversation.

"No, of course not! I might as well say it was Loraine myself as have you do so," said Alan. "And don't say anything about it to Loraine either. Just let's see what she and the other girls will do."

When the half-hour was over the boys returned to the house and went at once to their uncle Thaddeus, whom they found in his library.

"Well," said he, looking up from his book as they entered, "now, sit yourselves down and tell me the whole story. First of all, what is this I hear about the house being on fire? Mrs. Lee told me something of it, but now I want your version. Sidney, will you be spokesman?"

"It wasn't really on fire, you know, Uncle Thad," said Sidney, seating himself on the end of the library table, while Charles and Tom took each an arm of their uncle's chair and Alan drew up another chair and sat astride of it. "We were just having a game and pretending it was. We were having a jolly old time—Al and I were the fire department, and the others were being rescued while hanging out the window by

the bedclothes, when those idiotic maids came along and thought the house was really on fire and went and gave the alarm ! Did you ever hear of anything so lunny ? The engines and the hose-carriage came, and the insurance patrol, and there was the greatest old time you ever heard of."

Here Sidney paused to laugh at the recollection.

"Poor little Jimmy, though," said Alan ; "he got the worst of it, of course. He always does."

"Yes," continued Sidney, "he was dangling at the end of the bedclothes just as the engines came up, and he was so frightened he fell off, and Mrs. Lee took him in there. The firemen were awfully mad when they heard it was only a game, but Al has been down there and made it all right with them."

"But about your uncle Simon's thermometers ?" asked Mr. Thaddeus. "Did they get broken during the alarm of fire ?"

"No."

"When did that happen ?"

"Afterwards."

"And who did that ?"

There was no answer.

"Aren't you going to tell me, boys ?" asked their uncle, looking from one to the other. The eyes of the other three turned involuntarily towards Alan.

"Suppose you tell me about that, Alan," said Mr. West.

"There is nothing for me to tell, Uncle Thad."

"Did you break them ?"

"No, sir, I didn't."

"Did you, Sidney ?"

"No, Uncle Thad."

He asked each of them in turn, and the boys all answered in the negative.

"Did Phœbe herself?"

"Oh no!" they chorused; "not Phœbe."

"This is very mysterious," said Mr. West. "Some one must have broken them, and Phœbe says that Alan was in the room. Were you there, Alan?"

"Yes, I was there."

"What did you go there for?"

"I would rather not tell you, Uncle Thad, please."

"But suppose I insist upon knowing?" The uncle and nephew looked at each other for a moment, Alan astride the chair with his chin resting upon its back, and Mr. West leaning far back in his, with his keen blue eyes fixed upon his nephew's brown ones. "What then, Alan?"

"Why, Uncle Thad, I'm sorry, but I can't tell you anything more. I know it looks queer, for I was there; but I didn't break the thermometers and there are reasons—very good ones, too—why I can't tell you who did. Unless you can trust me I don't exactly see what to do. Of course I'm awfully sorry I can't explain, but I can't."

"And why can't the other boys?"

"Because I won't let them."

"Dear me, Alan, this will never do! What will your uncle Simon say to this?"

"I can't help what Uncle Simon says, Uncle Thad. You believe me, don't you?"

"Yes, my boy, I do."

"Well, then, I don't care what Uncle Simon says."

"My dear boy!"

"No, I don't. He wouldn't believe that it could be any one else than I, and I don't care what he thinks."

"My dear boy!" repeated Mr. Thaddens, and then relapsed into silence.

"This is a very serious matter," said he at last. "Your uncle Simon tells me that those thermometers were very valuable and a large number were broken—fifteen, he thinks. Now what is to be done about it? Your uncle Simon—well, my dear boys, it is quite natural that he should feel a little stirred up about it. I should myself, I am sure, be very much stirred up, and if he doesn't know who really did it I am afraid he will be apt to think it was you, Alan, and—and—that would be unfortunate. I wish, my dear boy, that you could tell me who it really was?"

"I can't, Uncle Thad. I'm awfully sorry, but I know you would agree with me if you knew about it. I wish I could tell you, but I know you would say I was doing right."

"Very well," said his uncle, sighing slightly; "I am sorry, that's all. And now run along, all of you. Your uncle Simon will probably be down directly and—and—well, I think it will be better for me to have a little talk with him alone before he sees you again."

"There's one thing more, Uncle Thad," said Sidney, as the boys turned towards the door; "your flower-beds got pretty well trampled on at the time of the fire alarm this morning, and we fellows are going to fix them up for you. We've only been waiting for the sun to get off them. We're awfully sorry they got hurt."

"I saw them as I came in," said Mr. Thaddeus, "but I thought I wouldn't ask about them just then. Very well, boys, fix them up, fix them up. I dare say they will look better than they did before."

"Isn't Uncle Thad a regular old brick?" said Charles, when with hoe and spade, a few minutes later, the boys were at work beneath the library window. "I'd cut my head off for him if he wanted it."

"So would I," agreed each of the others.

And Mr. Thaddeus West, on the other side of the closed blind, heard them and smiled tenderly, while the tears came at the same time into his eyes.

"My dear boys!" said he to himself, just as his brother Simon opened the door.

Mr. Thaddeus softly closed the window and then turned to face his still angry brother.

While these things had been transpiring in the West household the family on the other side of the hedge had been by no means tranquil. It was now almost four o'clock, and all this time Loraine had been waiting in vain for an opportunity to talk with either her father or her mother about the events of the morning.

The arrival of Mrs. Grafton had made a difference in the family routine, for that lady had been talking steadily ever since she came, and, naturally, had required an audience. Then Jimmy, up-stairs, had desired amusement. He wanted to be read to, he was lonely without the boys, and he wondered where they were. Mrs. Lee herself thought it somewhat strange that none of the boys had been in to see their brother.

She did not know how completely absorbed were the minds of all his relatives with another subject.

Lorraine remained with him while Mrs. Lee entertained her cousin Evelina, or, to be more exact, sat with her work and listened to the endless recitals of the new-comer. At last, as the clock struck four, Mrs. Lee rose and put away her work-basket.

"Now, my dear cousin, I am going to lie down for a little while," said she. "It is a hot day and I have a headache, we have had so much excitement to-day. And I advise you to take a little rest also."

"A headache! Helen, you would never have a headache if you followed my plan," said Mrs. Grafton. "After each meal—but then, of course, it makes a difference whether you dine or lunch in the middle of the day, though for my part I much prefer a late dinner, though as Mr. Grafton used to say, it does seem rather unreasonable—unreasonable? I am not quite sure that unreasonable was the word he used, though, after all, I don't know that it makes so very much difference— Why, Helen, where are you?"

"I have gone to lie down," said Mrs. Lee, from the landing on the stairs, "and if you will do the same, Cousin Evelina, you will be ready to take a little drive at half-past five, when it will be cooler, I hope."

There was nothing for Mrs. Grafton to do but to accede, and she was soon safely shut into her room, and Mrs. Lee departed, drawing a sigh of relief.

"Don't speak to me, my dear child!" she said to Lorraine, when she met her in the hall. "I am perfectly used up. This, after one afternoon, and Cousin Evelina says she has come for a long visit! However,

we must make the best of it and do all that we can for her, for she hasn't a relative in the world but ourselves, and her life is really a very lonely one. She seems to enjoy being in a home like this. I am going to shut my door, dear, for I am so tired."

"Oh, mother dear, I want to see you so much! I have been waiting so long to speak to you!" said Loraine.

But Mrs. Lee did not hear her, for her door was already closed, though had she happened to catch a glimpse of Loraine's anxious face she would certainly have foregone the rest, of which she was so much in need.

"I wonder where father is," sighed Loraine to herself, "and what I had better do. I must get some one to stay with Jimmy, so I suppose I must go after one of the boys. I wish he didn't keep asking for Alan. I suppose I shall have to ask him to come, and I hate to speak to him after this morning. Just as likely as not Alan has already told his uncles that I broke the thermometers. He is glad of a chance to tell about a girl, I suppose—he hates us so. The idea of my ever thinking I could reform him and make him like us! It is too ridiculous. He was *so* rude and disagreeable this morning. Of course it was very good of him to let me out, but then I think it was the least he could do, and he needn't have been so bearish about it. I will go in there now and tell one of them to come in to Jimmy. I wonder if it will be a good time to confess to Uncle Simon. Oh dear, I do think that Janet Franklin is the meanest girl that ever lived, not to help me out of this scrape!"

CHAPTER VIII

LORAINÉ found the four boys at work in the flower-beds. They had been talking together in low tones, but one of them, seeing her coming, had told the others to be quiet, so Loraine was quite sure that they had been speaking of her.

She longed to ask them if they had told their uncle that she had broken his thermometers, but she did not like to. There was an atmosphere of disapproval and formality about the boys this afternoon which was disconcerting, to say the least. The small amount of courage which she had been fostering with the intention of asking to see Mr. Simon West seemed to have disappeared. She literally did not dare to mention his name.

With a flushed face and faltering voice she told them that Jimmy wanted one of them to come in to see him.

"Which one?" asked Sidney, in a severe tone, while he continued to rake the bed.

"Either—at least, he said—well, Alan Ransford is the one he asked particularly for," replied Loraine, and then she turned to go home again.

She was surprised and grieved at the boys' attitude. She had expected to speak with them about the occurrence of the morning, to ask their advice about

apologizing to their uncle Simon, to be told what he had said when Alan had informed him who had been in the museum—that he had so informed him she had not the slightest doubt.

And now they were all against her. Even Sidney was cold and disapproving. Every one had deserted her, and Loraine felt as if she had not a friend in the world. If only Ethel Foster would come home, for she would stand by her, she felt sure !

As she walked slowly down the path and out of the gate, Alan overtook her on his way to visit Jimmy. He brushed hastily by her without a word, just as she was passing through the gate.

“Rude boy !” said Loraine, in a low voice.

Alan heard her and his face grew crimson. He knew that it had been a rude thing to do. He should have waited for her to go first, but it had not occurred to him, and then, his mind filled with scorn of Loraine, he would not beg her pardon. She had actually come to the house and had made no mention of any intention to set matters straight and explain the accident to his uncle ! He disliked girls more than ever, and he told himself that he did not care whether he were rude to them or not.

Suddenly Loraine stopped short just as she was about to enter their own place. She watched Alan run up the steps, cross the piazza, and disappear within the house.

“Now is the time,” said she. “I can do it better if I know that Alan isn’t anywhere round.”

Turning, she ran back over the path by which she had come, not pausing until she had reached the boys.

"Where is your uncle Simon?" she asked.

"In the library with Uncle Thad, I think," replied Sidney.

"Please take me in there," said Loraine. "I want to apologize."

Mr. Thaddeus and Mr. Simon West were in the midst of a somewhat heated discussion when the door opened and Loraine Lee walked into the room, followed by Sidney, who came in and closed the door.

He was glad that Loraine had come to explain matters. He only wished that Alan were present also, for he had been so sure that Loraine would not confess. Sidney had maintained a contrary opinion in discussing the subject, though secretly he had been a little afraid that Loraine would fall short of his estimate of her, for it seemed strange that she had allowed so many hours to go by. However, here she was at last, and Sidney's face was smiling and his whole air one of pride and triumph as he ushered her into his uncle's library.

Mr. Simon was sitting with his back to the door and did not see who it was.

"Are those boys coming in again?" snapped he. "I did hope that I should have a few minutes with you, Thaddeus! This affair—"

"Hush, Simon! We are not alone," interposed Thaddeus. "Ah, Loraine, this is pleasant! You have come in to cheer us up a little. Here is poor brother Simon who has met with a misfortune to-day. Perhaps you haven't heard?"

Mr. Simon had risen and had turned to leave the room.

"I will see you again, Thaddeus," said he, "when I hope we shall not be interrupted."

"Please wait a minute, Mr. West," said Loraine. "I want to speak to you."

Her color came and went and she pressed her hands nervously together as she stood in front of the stout, elderly gentleman. He paused and waited for her to continue, but she remained silent.

"Well," said he at last, "are you going to say anything?"

"Oh yes, of course!" faltered Loraine. "I am very sorry about it—and—and—I want to apologize."

"Sorry about what?"

"Why, for having done it. I apologize with all my heart. It was so careless and stupid of me. I ought never to have been there at all, but—well, that was not exactly my fault—at least I am awfully sorry, and I do hope you will forgive me."

"Thaddeus, what is she talking about? Can you explain?" demanded Mr. Simon.

"I can, Uncle Simon," said Sidney. "Loraine was the one who broke your thermometers. It was not Alan at all, you see. Al only got the keys from Phoebe so as to let Loraine out, for she was locked in."

Simon was quite speechless, but Thaddeus rose from his chair.

"My dear Loraine!" cried he, with a beaming face, "I never was so thankful to hear anything in my life. I am obliged to you, indeed I am! I am

deeply obliged to you for having been the one to break those thermometers."

"Thaddeus!" exclaimed his brother; "may I ask what you mean by such a remark as that?"

"Oh, no offence, no offence, I assure you, Simon! Only, as the thermometers had to be broken, I am glad it was little Loraine who did it and not one of the boys, for you know, my dear Simon, it would only have deepened your prejudice against them. And now, after all, Alan was not responsible! You are a dear girl, Loraine, for having broken—I mean I am glad you did it—that is, I'm glad you came and told about it!"

"But I am truly sorry about it, Mr. West," said Loraine. "I don't know what my father and mother will say when they hear about it. We—I—ought never to have been there. But didn't the boys tell you who did it?"

"Not a word," said Mr. Thaddeus, proudly, "and my brother has been thinking it was Alan. We couldn't get it out of the boy at all, except that he said he didn't do it; and I believed him! I believed him! I thought I could trust Alan's word, only it did seem strange when he acknowledged that he had been in the room and wouldn't say who else had been there."

"And may I ask how you happened to be there?" asked Mr. Simon. "Why you took advantage of my absence to investigate my private possessions?"

"Oh, I know it was dreadful, Mr. West! I have no excuse to offer, but please forgive me, and if—if—I can possibly pay for those thermometers that I broke, I hope you will let me do so."

"Humph!" grunted Mr. Simon, and left the room without another word. Perhaps secretly he was a little disappointed that it had not been Alan, after all.

This affair of the thermometers bore greater results than any one at the time would have thought possible. Loraine was surprised to find that Alan had said nothing of her participation in the affair, and she was touched with his generosity. After that day she was disposed to think of him with more friendliness than she had felt before, and, though there was as little intercourse as ever between the two, Loraine was conscious of a growing respect for him which she knew was due to his character, even though she still objected greatly to his roughness, not to say rudeness, of manner.

On the other hand, Alan, when he heard that Loraine had explained the affair to his uncle, began to think that there was some good in a girl, after all. He did not like them, he told himself, but they were not so absolutely devoid of principle as he had supposed.

This new idea of them was further strengthened by the appearance that evening of Janet Franklin, who came to confess to Mr. Simon West that she too had been guilty. That it was she, in fact, who had been the instigator of the mischief, although she had not been so unfortunate as her companion. No mention whatever was made of Ethel Foster.

Janet was very different from Loraine. She was not in the least afraid of Mr. West, and she carried matters off with such a high hand that the old gentleman forgot to be angry and found himself listening

with pleased attention to all that she said about the beauties of the museum.

Janet, when she had finished her call upon Mr. West, went next door to make her peace with Loraine, and very soon harmony was completely restored between them, and all went on as before.

Ethel Foster also came that evening to know what had taken place during her absence. She said that she had been at Chestnut Hill until after dinner, otherwise she would have come before to go with Loraine to make the confession and apology.

"You poor dear!" said she. "Did you really have to go alone? Where was Janet?"

"Janet came later," said Loraine, before Janet herself could speak.

"It was a perfect shame for you to have to do it alone," continued Ethel, taking Loraine's hand and kissing her. "Did you tell Mr. West I was there too?"

"I did not," said Loraine.

"Nor I," added Janet.

"I wonder if either of the boys did?"

"No, I am sure they didn't," said Loraine, "for they didn't tell who had been there at all. Alan took all the blame himself and never mentioned us in any way. I think it was perfectly splendid of him. His uncle was sure it was he."

"Well, then, if Mr. West doesn't know I was there and I didn't do a bit of harm by being there, it doesn't seem worth while for me to say anything to him about it, does it?"

"No-o," said both girls, though rather dubiously; "I don't suppose it is worth while."

"Of course, if you think I had better I will do it right away," said Ethel, quickly, "only to me it seems rather unnecessary. Don't you agree with me?"

And Janet and Loraine assented, though afterwards Loraine wondered why she should have done so.

Before Janet had gone to Mr. West, Loraine had felt very indignant with her for not having been more prompt, and she had been so confident that Ethel's course would be different; and now, after all, Ethel did not intend to say anything about her share in the proceedings. It was too puzzling a question to be decided that night, however, and Loraine fell asleep while she was thinking about it.

The boys had no such doubts on the subject. They talked the matter over most thoroughly, and they all agreed that Loraine was the pluckiest of the three, Janet followed not far behind, while Ethel Foster was not only cowardly, but was not perfectly honest.

"I have sized her up pretty completely," said Sidney. "She's making those girls believe that she was quite willing to own up, and would have done it if she had been there. Pshaw! such a girl makes me tired. She went off to Chestnut Hill on purpose, I'd be willing to bet you my new football, and stayed there until there was no possible chance of her being drawn into any confessions or apologies. I know her. She can't fool me!"

And Sidney drew himself up with an air of wishing to prove that where girls were concerned he was a true prophet.

"But I hope, Al," he added, "that you will acknowledge that some girls are worth something. Look at Loraine and Janet."

"Oh, I'll acknowledge anything you like," said Alan, "as long as you don't make me see anything more of them than is necessary. They are plucky enough, but an awful bore."

And saying this he picked up a book and took no further part in the conversation.

It was found, fortunately, that the broken thermometers were of small value after all, and although Mr. Lee begged to be allowed to pay for them, Mr. Simon West would not listen to it. His mind was now absorbed with a new subject, and the thermometers soon became a thing of the past.

He had begun another collection, that of quaint and curious rings, the idea having been suggested to him by the one which he had discovered when he purchased the gold-headed cane. There was one ring upon which he had so set his heart that it is probable that he would have given a large sum for its possession had that been possible, but it was one which money would not buy. It was the curious and by no means handsome ring which was worn by Mrs. Grafton on the first finger of her right hand, and it had been given to her by her late husband.

Mr. West had seen the ring on the day that he helped her from the train upon her arrival. Since then its memory haunted him. Impelled by it, he actually called at the house on the other side of the hedge, greatly to the Lees' surprise, for he had never done so before, and during his whole visit kept his

eyes steadily fastened upon the forefinger of Mrs. Grafton's right hand.

Mrs. Grafton chatted on, quite unconscious of the cause of Mr. West's attention, but pleased to find a new listener, and Mr. West answered at random, intent upon one question only. How could he gain possession of so remarkable a ring?

And as time went on but one solution of the difficulty presented itself. To gain the ring he must marry the widow!

"And why not?" said Mr. Simon West to himself, as he looked into his mirror and settled his gaudy necktie. "Why not? Older men than I have been known to marry. I am barely sixty-three, and don't look that. I defy any one to guess that I am sixty-three. Thaddeus, now, looks his age. He looks his sixty-five if he looks a day; but I am different. We always were different, Thaddeus and I. But what would Thaddeus say to this plan of mine? I suppose it would be upsetting to our household, rather upsetting, but no more so than boys. If there were another nephew to be found on the face of the globe, Thaddeus would bring him in—I know he would! A lady would not be half as disturbing. In fact, she will be a great addition to the household; of that I am sure."

Mr. West seemed to find it necessary to assure himself of this fact, for he repeated it several times.

"Of that I am sure! She seems like an amiable person, and though she has a great deal to say it isn't always necessary to listen attentively. After all, conversational powers are desirable in a lady, and—and—"

well, I never supposed that I should marry, but why not? why not? And then the ring! But I must be very quiet about it until it is all settled. It won't do to let Thaddeus know until then. No indeed! no indeed!"

And then Mr. Simon retired to the seclusion of his museum, there to ponder on the startling idea which had come to him so recently. His chief thought in connection with it was one of triumph that the coveted trinket would now be his. Fondly did he imagine it removed from the finger of its present owner and lying in a brand-new velvet case among his other treasures, the centre, the crowning glory of them all. The presence of Mrs. Grafton herself among his possessions was a mere bagatelle in his calculations and his castles in Spain.

And now the great difficulty was how to carry on his courtship unknown to and unhindered by his brother. It would never do to let Thaddeus become aware of his intentions until all was satisfactorily settled. And how were they to be hidden from him?

But the Fates seemed disposed to smile upon Uncle Simon in his quest of the ring and the widow, and, in the shape of Jimmy, came to his aid.

Jimmy's arm healed rapidly, but the child was so much weakened by the shock and the consequent suffering that the doctor ordered him to Atlantic City. Of course, Uncle Thaddeus must take him there, and this he was by no means unwilling to do. Atlantic City was the one spot on earth outside of his beloved home where Mr. Thaddeus West cared to be. He was in the habit of running down for a

day or two every spring; and although it was contrary to his usual custom to visit the place in summer, when it was always so crowded, he did not hesitate for an instant when the doctor said that Jimmy must be taken there, middle of August though it was.

“We will go to-morrow,” said he, “and two other boys shall go with me. Now the great question is, which shall be the ones to go? We must draw lots for it.”

Sidney and Alan were the lucky ones; but when Uncle Simon declared that he would not have more than one left at home, and that one must be Charles (who was the quiet member of the family, if quiet one there was), it was decided that Tom should go too.

“It seems rather hard on you, Charlie, I declare it does!” said Uncle Thaddeus, “but I don’t like to leave your uncle Simon entirely alone, even though he says he doesn’t object. You shall have something nice, though, to make up for it. Indeed, you shall! And perhaps you can come down for a day or two towards the end of the visit, when one of the other boys shall come home.”

The next day they were off, and the place seemed very lonely and quiet without them. Charles was away the greater part of the day with his friends, and when he was at home he had his carpentry and his experiments in invention to interest him. Perhaps he was the one of all the boys who least minded being left alone.

He would occasionally go next door to see Loraine and Janet, who, with Ethel, spent a large part of their

time there; but Charlie, although not objecting to the society of girls, found it less interesting than did Sidney. It was only when all else failed that he was willing to go in search of it.

During the absence of his brother and nephews it did not seem strange that Mr. Simon West should become more neighborly. Scarcely an afternoon or an evening passed but that, at one time or another, his portly form was seen to issue from his own front door, pass with dignified step down the gravelled walk and through the gate, and presently turn in at that beyond the hedge.

At first Mr. and Mrs. Lee made every effort to entertain their neighbor, but they soon found that this was unnecessary. All that Mr. West appeared to care for was to listen to the endless conversation—if so it could be called—of their cousin Evelina, and as this was the case the family were only too ready to encourage the partiality. Little dreaming of his real purpose, and only too glad to be relieved themselves of the duty of listening to the voluble Mrs. Grafton, they soon fell into the habit of withdrawing shortly after Mr. West's appearance upon the scene, thus quite innocently furthering his schemes. That the elderly gentleman was contemplating matrimony, after all these years of apparently confirmed bachelorhood, never occurred to them at all.

One very hot Sunday—it was about ten days after the departure of the West family for the seashore—Janet Franklin came to see Loraine early in the afternoon.

“I have come around here to get cool,” said she, by

way of explanation. "Cynthia's house is as hot as fire. I wish you and I were at Oakleigh. It's cool there, even when it's hot! The baby is crying, and Neal has such a lot to talk to Cynthia about that there isn't room for me at all. There isn't a cool spot anywhere, so I've come to see you. Wasn't it boiling in church this morning, and aren't you really glad there is no afternoon service this month? Come down to the tree, Loraine, and see if we can't find a breeze."

Loraine agreed, and, taking books to read and cushions upon which to rest, they repaired to the platform among the branches of the old tree at the foot of the garden. Here, though there was not much breeze, there were delicious shade and a comfortable place in which to stretch one's self out. The hum of insects, the subdued clucking among the hens next door, the occasional twitter of a bird, were the only sounds to be heard. The peculiarly somnolent feeling of a hot Sunday afternoon was in the air, and it was no wonder that both the girls were soon lulled off to sleep.

Loraine was enjoying a most interesting dream when she was awakened by Janet, who at the same time that she awakened her held a warning finger to her lips. Janet's bright eyes danced with mingled amusement and excitement as she whispered:

"Listen!"

CHAPTER IX

MR. SIMON WEST had determined to bring his suspense to an end that afternoon. Was the ring to be his or not? He must know before nightfall, and, hot though the day was, he would call upon Mrs. Grafton and make known to her his intentions.

It must be settled before Thaddeus should return, and there was every possibility that that event would take place within a few days, for it was now nearly two weeks since he and the nephews went to Atlantic City.

Mr. Simon ordered an early dinner, that ample time might be left for his usual nap before dressing for the call. It was a hot day, and no one felt the heat more than did Mr. West.

"But," said he to himself, "there are occasions when one must endeavor to rise above the weather, and this is one of them."

In spite of the additional half-hour appropriated to the nap, Simon found it difficult to compose himself to sleep. He seemed to be preternaturally wide-awake, and instead of the drowsy delight which he was in the habit of experiencing at this time of day, and particularly on a warm day, his mind alertly reviewed the situation, and he rehearsed again and again to himself the important question which he was about to ask.

At last, finding that sleep was impossible, he arose, dressed himself in a full suit of spotless duck, and, with a large red rose in his button-hole and his gold-headed stick—withdrawn from the collection for the purpose—in his hand, he emerged from the front door.

“Holloa, Uncle Simon!” said Charles from the hammock, where he lazily swung to and fro under the trees. “Are you going out?”

Mr. West paused and turned with majestic gesture towards his nephew.

“Charles,” said he, “that is an unnecessary question. You must see for yourself that I am.”

“Oh!” remarked Charles, and said no more at the moment, but he raised himself on one elbow and watched his uncle as he walked to the gate.

“Where is he going?” he thought. “In next door, as sure as I’m alive! Seems to me he goes in there an awful lot lately. I wonder what’s up. But oh, dear me, it’s too hot to think about it!” And he sank again into a more comfortable position.

Through the meshes of the hammock, however, he watched his uncle, and he saw him pause for a moment at their own gate. In that brief moment the realization of what he was about to do swept over Mr. Simon West with overwhelming force.

It was not too late, even now. Should he go back? After all, was he doing wisely? He and Thaddeus passed a peaceful and eminently satisfactory existence as they were, in spite of the boys. Was it well to exchange certainty for uncertainty?—A life which, though it had its drawbacks, was not without its

pleasures, for one which might be—who could tell what?

Perhaps Mr. Simon would have turned back even then had it not been for a trifling occurrence, and it is often upon some such trifling occurrence that one's whole after-life may hinge. Charles, in the hammock, seeing him pause, and prompted by the spirit of mischief within him, called out loudly, and perhaps somewhat jeeringly:

"What's the matter, Uncle Simon? Aren't you going, after all? Have you forgotten something?"

"Certainly not, and to be sure I am going," replied his uncle, with more emphasis than the occasion seemed to require, and without further delay he walked on.

Arrived at the house next door, Mr. West found to his satisfaction that no one was on the piazza. The house was cooler on such a day as this, and Mr. Lee had retired to the seclusion of the library while the ladies of the family were up-stairs.

Mr. West asked for Mrs. Grafton and was shown into the parlor. It was quite dark, for the blinds were closed to keep out the heat as well as the light, and only at the farther end of the room had a crack been left open for the benefit of Evelina, the parrot, who swung there in her cage and who disliked darkness, as all parrots do.

Mr. West's eyes had ample time in which to become accustomed to the semi-twilight of the room, for it was at least twenty minutes before Mrs. Grafton, in all the crisp discomfort of her best black silk gown, fluttered in.

She was a carelessly put together person, and there was always an end of hair sticking out where it should not, or a bit of lace with a frayed edge that made itself conspicuous, or a brooch that was forever undone. She was apt to drop her handkerchief when it was least convenient for some one else to pick it up, and when she walked abroad on a muddy day she was obliged constantly to stop and draw on her overshoes, which were inclined to leave her feet.

To-day she had forgotten to take a last look in her mirror, and one crimping-pin which she had omitted to remove nestled among the front locks which had been put up for the afternoon, but which were now rapidly straightening under stress of the weather.

"Mr. West, how good of you this warm day!" said she, extending a limp but cordial hand of welcome, upon which glittered the amethyst and silver ring; "though, after all, not so warm but what it might be warmer, as Mr. Grafton, my late husband, used to say; but then Mr. Grafton was such a weather prophet. He knew in a moment if the wind was east that rain was probable; not that we ever have such east winds as they do in Boston—but then I never was in Boston, in fact—"

"Madam," said Mr. West, interrupting her with a mighty effort, "I have come to—I am here because—in short, I—"

"Oh, shut up!" cried a voice from the back of the room.

Mr. West paused, and the color deepened in his already crimson face.

"Who is that, may I ask?" said he.

"Only Evelina, the dear parrot!" returned Mrs. Grafton. "Such a sweet bird, and usually makes the most apt remarks. But as I was saying—"

"Madam," said Simon again, "will you allow me to continue? I have come this afternoon for the purpose of asking you—of requesting—that is, of begging you—or rather, I would say, I wish to inform you of the state—"

"Shut up, you bad boy! Hold your tongue!"

"Dear Ev-e-leen-a, sweet Ev-e-leen-a,
My love for you can nev-er, never die!"

sang the parrot in the window.

"A most impertinent bird!" said Mr. West. "Madam, I will make one more trial, and if I am again interrupted I must beg you to come with me to some spot where there will be nothing to disturb me. I have come to ask you an important question, and it is imperative that I should have a quiet place in which to do it. After giving the matter due consideration, I have reached a conclusion which I confess is quite unexpected—that is—I have not been thinking of it long, or rather—well, I would say that from the moment my eyes first fell upon that extraordinarily beautiful ring—I mean—I would say, upon the hand adorned by that ring—Evelina—"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the discordant voice in the cage. "Ha! ha! ha! What's the matter with Evelina? *She's* all right!"

"Madam," said Mr. Simon, rising from his chair, "will you do me the honor to accompany me to the garden? That bird is worse than a boy!"

Mrs. Grafton acquiesced, and once out in the light she recovered the use of her tongue, which had been temporarily silenced by the extreme formality and impressiveness of Mr. West's manner. She felt that this was an occasion of some importance, but she was not quite sure of what was coming. It had already crossed her mind that Mr. West's attentions were becoming serious, but that they would reach so speedy a culmination she had not supposed possible.

She chattered away, however, with many references to the opinion of her late husband, Mr. Grafton, until she and her portly companion reached the old tree in the garden, in the shade of which stood rustic benches and chairs. A soft carpet of grass was beneath their feet, and overhead spread the wide branches of the tree where was the platform, which was reached by a rustic ladder.

Mrs. Grafton seated herself without looking up, and Mr. West did the same. A gleam of sunlight came through the thickly growing leaves and danced on the amethyst ring, which caught its radiance, and in consequence appeared many times more brilliant than it actually was. Mr. West's eyes were fairly dazzled by the sight, and it gave him courage to continue. He cleared his throat loudly, looked about him to be sure that no disturbing parrot was within earshot, and began again.

"Mrs. Grafton—madam—perhaps I may say Evelina—"

Mrs. Grafton blushed and nervously adjusted her brooch, which had dropped into her lap.

"My dear sir !" said she.

Mr. West appeared to like the sound of her name, for he repeated it.

"Evelina, I have the honor to ask you to become my wife."

"My dear sir!" reiterated Mrs. Grafton.

"Yes, I have the honor to ask you to become my wife. I acknowledge that this may be unexpected, that you have not foreseen this, that, in short, it is a surprise to you. So it is to me, I assure you. So it is to me. And what Thaddeus will say—that is—ahem! I would say that I shall be most happy if you will do me the honor. I never intended to marry, but circumstances"—here his eyes, momentarily removed from Mrs. Grafton's ring to Mrs. Grafton's face, returned to the former object of their attention—"circumstances have made me think differently. What is that?"

He paused abruptly and listened. The platform above seemed to creak, and there was a peculiar sputtering noise from the tree.

"Some bird, most likely," murmured Mrs. Grafton.

"Bird, madam? Another bird? May I ask why all the birds seem determined to interrupt me?"

"I don't know, I am sure," replied Mrs. Grafton; "as my late husband, Mr. Grafton, used to say frequently, 'birds of a feather—'"

"Madam, will you kindly leave the subject of birds and tell me whether you will or will not become my wife?"

"Really, Mr. West, this is such a surprise! I never anticipated marrying again, for I was perfectly devoted to my late husband, Mr. Grafton; and though he died

so many years ago"—here from force of habit the widow raised her handkerchief to her eyes—"but not so many years ago but what I remember him perfectly, what he said and what he did ; though as poor, dear Mr. Grafton himself used frequently to say, I have an extraordinary memory for names, but not for faces. Indeed, I have frequently been known to pass my dearest friends in the street—my dearest friends, I say, but that may be an exaggeration. I mean people I know very well indeed, though in these days—"

"Madam !" cried Mr. West, unable to bear it longer, "will you have the goodness to tell me whether you will or will not become my wife?"

There was a moment's silence, and again the platform above them creaked ominously. Mrs. Grafton glanced up at it, while Mr. West rose from his chair. He walked about the tree and looked at it critically. He even examined the rustic ladder as though he had some thought of ascending it, but on second thoughts relinquished the idea. From the ground it was impossible to see who was on the platform if any one who was there chose to remain hidden, for there was a solid wooden fence around the edge of it which completely concealed the occupants if they crouched upon the floor.

Mr. West having completed his investigations, returned to his companion.

"I should almost have thought," said he, "that some one was in this tree, but I can see no one. Charles, the only boy, I am happy to say, who is at home, I left in the hammock in front of my house. Do you know anything of the whereabouts of the girls?"

"Loraine is in her room," returned Mrs. Grafton. "I saw her go to it myself when I went up-stairs after dinner. I assure you, Mr. West, that the sounds are caused by birds, who perhaps are building their little nests, though I am sure I didn't know this was the season for nests, though, as Shakespeare himself says, 'the seasons are out of joint'—or was it 'the times are out of joint'? I'm sure I don't know which, but, after all, it is of no consequence, though I am sure it says in the Bible somewhere that there's a time for everything—a time to laugh and a time to—"

"And this, madam," exclaimed Mr. West, in desperation—"this is a time to say either yes or no. May I ask you once more and for the last time, will you or will you not become my wife?"

"Oh, Mr. West!" faltered the widow; "you quite take my breath away! I suppose I must say just what I said to Mr. Grafton, my late husband, when he asked me, though, to be sure, his way of asking was quite different from yours; but then—"

"I am to infer, then, madam, that you *will* become my wife?" asked Mr. West.

"Yes, Mr. West; I—I am so alone in the world I—I really think I will, though I am rather taken by surprise."

"Then that's decided," said the suitor, removing his hat and mopping his heated brow. "I am glad of it! After all, it is a wise move, I feel sure—a very wise move. There is nothing like matrimony for settling a man, and—and—well, I am glad you look at it as I do, and I feel quite sure we shall be very comfortable—that is, happy. And now, per-

haps, madam—I should say, Evelina—perhaps as it is such a very warm day and it is yet rather early in the afternoon, I will return to my house, this question of mine being so satisfactorily answered, and I will call again this evening. Perhaps it will be as well to say nothing about our—ahem!—engagement for a few days, not until my brother Thaddeus returns, if you have no objections.”

“Certainly not,” returned Mrs. Grafton, who had risen to her feet; “I would much prefer myself to keep it a secret until I have collected my thoughts, though as poor, dear Mr. Grafton used to say—”

And then they walked away, and what “Mr. Grafton used to say” was lost to the hearing of the eavesdroppers in the tree.

Loraine and Janet were reduced by this time to a state of such uncontrollable mirth that it is quite sure that their whereabouts would have been discovered if Mr. West and Mrs. Grafton had not so opportunely left the garden. Both girls were huddled upon the floor of the platform, with their crimson faces hidden in the sofa-pillows which they had brought out with them to the tree. Nothing could be seen to move but their shaking shoulders, though occasionally a foot would convulsively scrape the floor and cause the sound which Mrs. Grafton had attributed to a nest-building bird.

“Did you ever hear anything so funny in your life?” exclaimed Janet, in a husky whisper. “My dear, I nearly died! Positively, I could not have borne it another minute. If they hadn’t gone away when they did, I should have shrieked right out. Oh, Loraine!”

And again she cast herself down and rolled upon the floor.

"What will the boys say?" said Loraine; "and father and mother? Oh, Janet, those poor boys, to have Cousin Evelina go there to live, and I have been counting the days for her to leave here! Those poor boys and dear Uncle Thaddeus! Don't you pity them?"

"Yes, I am sorry for them," said Janet, "but perhaps Uncle Simon won't be so cross when he is married. It *may* have a soothing effect upon him, though I should think that talking Mrs. Grafton would make him crosser than ever. When do you suppose they are going to tell it?"

"I don't know, and I've just been thinking that I suppose it was dreadful for us to have listened."

"I suppose it was; but, Loraine, how could we help it? I am sure we were sound asleep and not dreaming of their coming here when Mr. West cleared his throat so tremendously that he woke me up, and then he talked at the top of his voice. How could we help hearing? And we couldn't tell him in the midst of his proposal that we were here, could we?"

"No, that is true," said Loraine; "that would have been dreadful. I thought I was going to sneeze at one time, but I managed to stifle it. Dear me, I wish we could tell people about it; but it won't do, I suppose."

"Oh, can't we tell?" cried Janet, in dismay; "why, I was counting on telling Neal and Cynthia! They would enjoy it so much."

"And I would like to tell father and mother, and

Ethel, too. Ethel would think it a splendid joke, but I am sure it won't do, Janet," said Loraine, very earnestly. "Indeed, it wouldn't be honorable. As long as we overheard it by chance we surely haven't the right to tell it, do you think so?"

"No, I suppose you are right," said Janet, regretfully; "I hadn't thought of it myself, and I was quite looking forward to making Neal and Cynthia shriek with laughter to-night, but I see that it wouldn't be honorable at all. We can laugh over it together, though, and really I think it was one of the funniest things I ever heard of. Don't you wish you could have seen Uncle Simon as well as listened to him? How he must have strutted about and held up his funny, shiny bald head, and looked so important! What *do* you suppose is making him do it?"

"I can't imagine," said Loraine. "He surely can't be in love with her. I suppose Cousin Evelina is very well off, but then the Wests have lots of money themselves; so it can't be that. I think it is just as surprising that Cousin Evelina will marry him, except, as she said herself, she is entirely alone in the world. Mother is always telling me we ought to be kind to her because she has no near relations. But oh, I am sorry for Uncle Thad and the boys! What do you suppose they will do, and how soon do you suppose they will hear it?"

The girls talked the matter over and laughed until they were quite exhausted, and slowly but surely the hot afternoon, destined to be so memorable in the annals of the West family, drew to a close. Janet went home and Loraine into the house to dress for

tea, and after a time the sun sank redly in the west, giving promise of another scorching day to-morrow ; a faint breeze sprang up and bravely tried to cool the simmering earth, and the moon, almost full, shone down through the August night.

The Lee family sat upon the piazza, as was their custom during the summer, and Mrs. Grafton, for once strangely quiet, was with them. Mr. Simon West came in to see them, but he sat the greater part of the time in silence.

Charles, too, came in for half an hour, but he found Loraine less entertaining than usual. She was absorbed in watching her cousin and her elderly *fiancé*.

"I wish I could tell, but it will never do," said she to herself. It would not only be dishonorable and unfair, but I'm sure if we all knew it we could never keep it in. We should be sure to let it out in some way. I only hope Janet will be careful. She is so fond of telling things and laughing them over with people. I must warn her again."

CHAPTER X

THE next morning when Loraine was dusting the parlor — one of her duties during vacation — Ethel Foster came up the front steps and across the piazza. The windows were wide open to let in the light and air before the heat of the day, and Loraine was plainly visible as she moved about with her dusting-cloth. Ethel looked in at the window.

“Oh, good-morning, dear!” said she. “How busy you look. Do you have to do that? Thank goodness, the maid does it at our house. I don’t know what I should do if I had to dust. I simply couldn’t, you know. But I have come for a special purpose. What do you suppose it is?”

“I can’t imagine,” said Loraine, who, though perfectly contented before, suddenly became conscious that dusting was somewhat of a bore, and she wondered why her mother expected her to do it. “Something nice, I hope.”

“I hope you will think so. I want you to come spend the day with me. The family are all going to be away, and we shall have the whole place to ourselves. I am not going to ask Janet too, because—well, I want just you alone for a change, and next time I will ask her. Do come, Loraine! We shall have a perfect time.”

Loraine went to ask her mother's consent, which was finally given, albeit a trifle unwillingly. Ethel Foster was not a favorite with the elder members of the families of her friends. They thought that for so young a girl she had too much self-assurance to be attractive, and Mrs. Gordon said when discussing her that her eyes were not to be trusted.

Neither did the boys like her, but Loraine and Janet, particularly Loraine, were both quite fascinated by her, and Janet declared that Cynthia's opinion was worth nothing at all, for she invariably either cordially liked or as cordially detested people. According to her younger sister, Cynthia's estimate of her acquaintances was of no value whatsoever.

Mrs. Lee did not care to have Loraine spend much of her time with Ethel, but this morning the girl was so anxious to go that her mother yielded to her entreaties and gave her consent.

The Fosters lived in a fine old house on the main street of Germantown, in a part of the town which is famous for its historic interest, and Loraine never wearied of wandering about the place and dreaming of the stirring times of the Revolution. It was not so very long ago, after all, as events in history count, that Washington's headquarters had been within a stone's-throw of this very spot; and she liked to think of the battle of Germantown, and to picture to herself her brave ancestors who had fought for liberty on the very ground, perhaps, over which she was now walking so carelessly with Ethel Foster this summer morning.

Ethel was not greatly interested in these things,

and on this particular morning her mind was intent upon one subject only. In fact, she had invited Loraine to spend the day with her, because she had this especial purpose in mind, and had, for the same reason, omitted Janet Franklin.

"Now what shall we do to-day?" said she. "It is too hot to ride our wheels—indeed, it is too hot to do anything almost but sit still and drink raspberry shrub. Suppose we sit on the shady side of the piazza and talk. I have lots to tell you, Loraine, and I am sure you have something to tell me. Really, do you know, there isn't another girl in the world I like so much to talk to as to you. I feel like telling you everything, you dear thing!"

By this time the girls had reached the wide, shady piazza, which had been broadened at this corner of the house, and was furnished with rattan chairs, settees, and tables, and made to resemble an out-door sitting-room. Vines climbed to the piazza roof, and Japanese blinds helped to shut out the glare, while if there was any breeze whatever it was sure to make itself felt at this corner.

It was a charming spot for a hot morning, and when a maid appeared with a tray laden with a glass pitcher of raspberry shrub in which the ice clinked refreshingly, and a plate of delicious-looking jumbles, Loraine felt that her day bid fair to be a pleasant one.

"But I feel awfully hurt about something," said Ethel, after they had been talking for some time and she had imparted numerous interesting confidences to her friend; "I really do, Loraine!"

"Why, what do you mean, Ethel?" cried Loraine,

helping herself at the same time to another jumble.
“Not hurt with me, surely!”

“Yes, hurt with you. Here I have been telling you everything, all sorts of things I never would dream of telling any other girl, and yet there is something you haven’t told me a word about.”

“Why, Ethel, what do you mean?” asked Loraine again, at the same time becoming conscious of what she did mean.

“Oh, you know!” said Ethel, narrowing her eyes with the habit peculiar to her; “you know well enough. I feel awfully hurt about it, for you tell Janet Franklin things that you won’t tell me. You don’t care for me half as much as I do for you.”

“Oh, Ethel, I do! I love you dearly; you know I do, and I can’t imagine what you mean unless it is what happened yesterday afternoon.”

Ethel nodded.

“But how do you know anything about that?”

“I met Janet when she was going home from your house.”

“And she told you? Well, I am surprised that she did, for we both agreed that it wouldn’t do to say a word to anybody.”

“There,” exclaimed Ethel, “I knew you didn’t want me to know! I just knew it, and it’s too bad of you, Loraine, when I tell you everything.”

“But it isn’t that, Ethel!” cried Loraine, greatly distressed; “I should just love to have you know it, indeed I should, and I only wish you had been there too, for it was so funny, and I would so much rather have had you know it than not, but Janet and I over-

heard it all by chance, and we thought we oughtn't to talk about it. However, as long as Janet has told you, I can't help it, and I may as well have the fun of talking about it too."

"Do," said Ethel; "I am crazy to hear all about it!"

"But I thought you said Janet told you."

"She didn't tell me everything," returned Ethel, somewhat evasively; "and, besides, I want to hear your version of it. I love to hear you tell a story. Take some more raspberry. It's refreshing, isn't it? Loraine, you're a dear thing to tell me!"

Without stopping for further consideration of the wisdom of such a course, Loraine gave an entertaining account of the events of yesterday afternoon. Ethel laughed heartily, of course, and was intensely interested. She was such an appreciative listener that Loraine warmed to her subject and told more than she had at first intended, making an excellent story of the whole affair.

They wondered what the boys would say, and from that they reached the subject of Atlantic City, and Loraine told Ethel that it was planned for her to go down for a few days with Mr. and Mrs. Neal Gordon and Janet Franklin while the Wests were there.

A letter had come from Mr. Thaddeus West that very morning saying that if his brother could spare him he would stay a week or so longer, for, although Jimmy was improving steadily, he was not yet really well enough to come home. Sidney should return, however, to take the place of Charles, whose turn it was to go down. Mr. Simon West, Loraine said, seemed

rather relieved to hear that his brother wished to stay longer, and had written him that he was not needed, nor was Sidney. Charles should join his brothers at the sea-shore, but it was not at all necessary for any one of them to come home to take his place. Their uncle Simon preferred to be alone.

"He is afraid to have Sidney come, I suppose," said Loraine. "Sidney is so clever that he would find out right away about the engagement. I'm glad he doesn't have to come as long as we are going down. I think we shall have great fun. I only wish you were going with us, Ethel!"

Here Loraine paused abruptly. She wished that she could ask Ethel to join the party, but she did not feel that she had the right to do so without Mrs. Gordon's permission, under whose care Loraine was to be. She knew that Mrs. Gordon did not like Ethel, and it would be useless to ask her consent.

"She won't want her," said Loraine to herself. "I don't see why it is that neither Mrs. Gordon nor mother like Ethel. Mrs. Gordon is more decided than any one else about it. I think she is a person who takes very strong prejudices, and nothing would induce her to ask Ethel to go, so I shall have to give up the idea."

"What are you thinking about?" asked Ethel, who had been watching her guest with some intentness.

"Oh, nothing much."

"I can't imagine any one caring to go to Atlantic City in August," said Ethel, with an air of superiority. It almost seemed as if she had divined Loraine's

thoughts, and wished to make her understand that she would not go with them even if she had the opportunity. "It is frightfully crowded and common there now."

"Yes," returned Loraine, somewhat vaguely. Then she added: "But you won't tell any one what I have told you, will you, Ethel?"

"About Atlantic City? Is that a secret?" asked Ethel, with a shrug of surprise.


"Oh no, of course not! I meant about Uncle Simon and Cousin Evelina. You know you are the only person who knows it besides Janet and me, and it would never do for any one to hear it outside."

"You must have very little confidence in me," said Ethel, with an offended air; "less so than Janet has."

"Oh no, I haven't; but there is no harm in asking you to be careful, Ethel."

Loraine went home soon after luncheon, for the party was to leave for Atlantic City the next day, and her mother wished her to come early in the afternoon to attend to her packing. After all, the day had not been so pleasant as she had anticipated. It had been fun to tell Ethel about Mr. West, but as soon as it was told and they had laughed over it and then had passed to other subjects, Loraine had begun to regret that the secret had slipped into other hands. She had said that she would not tell it, and even though Janet had been the one to impart it to Ethel in the first place, that was really no excuse for Loraine to say anything about it.

Perhaps Janet had not told as much as she did. Ethel was so interested in Loraine's story and had



appeared so surprised that it did not seem as if she could have heard anything of it before, and yet she had certainly given Loraine to understand that Janet had told her about it last night.

Loraine thought this all over on her way home, and she concluded not to mention Ethel's knowledge of the tale to Janet just yet. It was really only right that Janet should inform her that she had told Ethel. In the meantime Loraine would remain silent. The truth was that she was secretly somewhat doubtful about the safety of Ethel as a confidante, though she hesitated to say this even to herself. She was very much afraid that the news of the engagement would become public property before Mr. West and Mrs. Grafton were ready to tell of it.

However, this idea seemed unjust to Ethel, and surely, Loraine thought, she should have more confidence in her. She had not dared urge Ethel again to be careful, for she had appeared to resent such admonitions, and Loraine did not wish to offend her. The only course was to dismiss the subject from her mind and to hope for the best, and this Loraine determined to do.

The next day the Gordons, with Janet, Loraine, and Charles West, departed for Atlantic City. Uncle Thaddeus and the boys met them upon their arrival and accompanied them to the hotel. Fortunately it had been possible to secure rooms at the one at which they were staying, and the party anticipated all sorts of good times together.

It was the height of the season, and the broad board-walk which spreads its vast length from end to

end of the island was thronged with pedestrians at all hours of the day and evening. The proprietors of the various shops and booths on the one side of it were doing a flourishing business, while on the other the ocean rolled in, breaking in mighty waves and dashing white foam over the very foundations of the buildings.

It is a strange scene which the ocean looks upon at Atlantic City. Upon the very edge of the sea stretches this long line of shops and shows, bath-houses and pavilions, merry-go-rounds and shooting-galleries. In one place the board-walk is built directly over the wild, green breakers, in another the curving of the beach carries it some distance away, and wide stretches of sand afford more primitive accommodation for walking or resting than the wooden promenade or the pavilions that are filled with chairs and benches.

Janet was the only member of the party who had not been to the place before, and she was so filled with astonishment at all that she saw that she could scarcely tear herself away from the beach that evening.

"It is so odd and queer," said she. "I have been to the sea-shore over and over again at home, of course, but never to a place like this. Where are the rocks, and why is there no grass at all, and no trees? And where do all these people come from?"

Her brother-in-law laughed. "It is not like Nahant or Beverly, I confess, Janet," said he. "You forget that you're in New Jersey, where there isn't a rock to be found from end to end of the coast, and as for the people—well, they are from everywhere, but chiefly from Philadelphia, and I acknowledge they are not

very much like the 'cold roast Boston' who honor the north shore with their presence. You mustn't be too particular at Atlantic City."

"Oh, but I like them, Neal! I think it is perfect here," cried Janet. "The only trouble is, I get so interested in watching the millions of people that I forget to look at the ocean, and that seems so strange. And what are all these shows?"

"They are the greatest fun of all," said Sidney, who happened to be walking with them. "Uncle Thad has taken us to nearly all of them, but we are going to do them all over again now that you have come. We thought we would wait until to-morrow night, though, for there is so much to see outside the first night."

"It is certainly the most fascinating place I ever was in," said Janet, sighing with satisfaction, "and I would like to stay here for months. I'm sure I should never get tired of it."

Janet and Loraine occupied a room together, and this, in their opinion, constituted no small part of the pleasure of the trip. It was great fun to go off on a journey together, and to be the only girls among such a large party of boys gave promise of many good times, especially as the boys—always excepting Alan—were such nice ones.

But even Alan had improved, Loraine confided to Janet that night when, the interesting evening on the beach having come to an end, they had gone to their room.

"He really was quite sociable," said Loraine, "and actually was polite! I dropped my jacket and he

had the grace to pick it up, and not only did he pick it up, but he carried it for me! Did you ever hear anything so astounding? Atlantic City air has certainly done him good, and I only hope the improvement will last."

"I do wonder what those boys will say when they hear about Uncle Simon," said Janet, who was diving into the depths of her trunk in a vain search for something that she wanted.

Loraine did not reply. This was not the first time since they left home that Janet had referred to the affair, and on every occasion Loraine had expected her to tell of the meeting with Ethel; but, strangely enough, Janet had not mentioned Ethel's name in any connection whatever.

This was most marked, Loraine thought, and showed very plainly that Janet wished to avoid any reference to her.

"Very well," said Loraine to herself, "I won't say anything about it, either! Janet was the first to tell Ethel, and so she ought to be the first to tell me. I will just wait for her to speak first."

"Where are those slippers?" murmured Janet, who continued to toss her possessions to and fro. "I can find nothing in the shoe line but these dreadful bathing-shoes! I suppose I'll be glad enough to have these to-morrow when we go in to bathe, but at present I want my slippers, and here they are at last! Oh, dear me, I can scarcely wait for to-morrow to come, and I know it will be a long time coming, for I'm so fearfully wide-awake. Do you know, we are going to do all those delightful things on the board-

walk, Loraine ! Sidney says it's quite customary to ride on the merry-go-round and fly about in the toboggan-slide, and everything else. Aren't you perfectly crazy about it, Loraine ? I'm so glad Ethel isn't with us, aren't you ?"

"Why ?" asked Loraine.

"Oh, because, in the first place, she would have turned up her nose at everything. She is so terribly toplofty, and she looks down on Atlantic City. She wouldn't condescend to do any of these things, you may be sure. Then it would have been a bother about the rooms. One of us would have had to be alone, and that would have been horrid. And then, the boys don't like her, and that would have been awkward ; and besides all that, do you know I really and truly would rather have you all to myself ! I know you don't feel so, for you are so fond of Ethel. Well, I am too, for that matter, but I think sometimes two girls have a better time than three."

"So do I," said Loraine, "and I suppose, as long as you and I are the only ones who like her very much, perhaps it is just as well she didn't come. Janet—"

Here Loraine stopped. She was hanging her dresses upon the hooks provided for the purpose, and perhaps that was the reason for her sudden pause.

"Well," said Janet, "what were you going to say ?"

"Oh, nothing much."

"Yes, you were, too. I know you were. What is it ?"

"I was only going to ask you if you think Ethel is

a girl to be trusted ? Did you—did you ever tell her anything you didn't want any one else to know ?”

“Is that all ? What a funny question,” said Janet, yawning. “I don't know, I'm sure. Yes, I suppose I have. I verily believe I'm getting sleepy. Do hurry up and put out the light, Loraine, and don't say another word to me or I shall get all waked up.”

In three minutes Janet was sound asleep, and Loraine was no nearer than before to a knowledge of how much confidence Janet reposed in Ethel.

“It's the strangest thing that Janet doesn't tell me about it,” she said to herself, as she lay awake, “and she certainly tried then to avoid the subject. She couldn't really have grown sleepy so suddenly. It almost makes me feel as if Janet were not to be trusted herself. Dear me, I do wish people wouldn't be so puzzling !”

And then she too fell asleep.

CHAPTER XI

THE next morning Loraine and Janet were early awake. They were among the first at the breakfast-table, and had quite finished when Mr. and Mrs. Gordon made their appearance, although it was not late even then.

"I stopped at your door," said Cynthia, "and found you flown. Why did you get up so early?"

"We have no time to waste while we are at Atlantic City," returned Janet; "we must make the most of every minute. We are going to take a long walk with the boys early, before it is time to bathe, and the whole day is planned out."

"Then I suppose we have seen the last of you," said Mr. Gordon, "and Cynthia and the baby and I will be left to ourselves. All I ask is don't get drowned, and reserve a little energy for to-night's programme, for I have set my heart on a ride on the merry-go-round."

"You may be sure of that," laughed the girls, as they ran off to get their hats.

The day passed all too quickly. The boys, with the exception of Alan, were very glad to have such an addition to their party, and even he thawed somewhat under the genial influence of Mr. and Mrs. Gordon, whom he liked extremely. Uncle Thaddeus was in

high spirits. He was glad to see his little favorite, Loraine, once more, and Janet's frank, merry ways entertained him even while he preferred Loraine's more gentle manner. He always encouraged their presence among his nephews, and he secretly hoped that in time Alan might overcome his diffidence and his fancied dislike for their society.

That afternoon Mr. West invited the whole party to go to drive, and then came the evening with its unique entertainment, which Janet had been anticipating all day.

The board-walk was, as usual, crowded with people. The day had been a hot one in the city, and as many as could do so had escaped from its confinement and had hastened to the sea-side for a breath of pure, cool air and for the diversion which was always to be found there.

It was still early twilight when the Wests and Gordons, the procession headed by Uncle Thaddeus and Jimmy, joined the throng of thousands who walked up and down the broad promenade and made their way to the various places of amusement which they intended to visit.

It was almost high-water, and as the moon was at the full to-night the tide would be especially high. The waves were rolling in over the upper part of the beach in a long, grand sweep, rearing their mighty crests of foam, curving, breaking, and rushing away up over the sand with a deafening roar, or dashing beneath the board-walk and breaking far beyond it, thus making one feel far out at sea on a vessel's deck. A stiff salt breeze came over the water to refresh the

heat-weary multitudes from the cities. The rocking-chairs which filled the pavilions were all occupied, and were all rocking briskly with a bewildering lack of unanimity, while mingled with the roar of the breakers was the tramp, tramp of human feet.

In the distance, but ever seeming to draw nearer as the Germantown party walked rapidly towards it, were the strains of music which at any hour of the day and evening blend with the other board-walk sounds of Atlantic City. They entered the building whence this music issued, and found themselves in a large hall where was an immense circular platform which was forever turning around. A huge mechanical organ in the centre ground out the popular tunes of the day, and on the platform itself was arranged a collection of wooden animals representing every species that ever entered the Ark, although astonishingly alike as to size.

There were camels and lions, roosters and swans, reindeer with sleighs attached, pleasant-looking zebras and smiling goats, and these creatures were being ridden not only by boys and girls, but by men and women of mature years. These riders gravely held their bridles and sailed around in the full glare of electric light, apparently quite unconscious of the gaze of the large audience who occupied chairs in every part of the hall, and who rocked as gayly and as unremittingly as did their friends without.

When the melody had reached its final chords, and the platform slowed its circular journey, Mr. West, who had been buying tickets, summoned his party to follow him and stepped on board. He chose an amia-

ble-looking lion for his steed, and Loraine and Janet, as they hastily mounted the pair of zebras which they had selected, exchanged a glance of amusement, for Uncle Thaddeus, with his thin, humorous face surmounted by a soft, gray felt hat, and his long legs astride of a lion, was certainly an entertaining picture.

From the merry-go-round they went to the toboggan-slide, where their breath was almost taken away by the rapid rush through space, and thence to the theatre. Here they formed almost the entire audience, and they watched with intense interest the representation of *A Day at Sea*.

The chief, in fact the only, character in this thrilling play was a miniature ship which sailed a painted ocean. At first all went well. The little vessel moved calmly over a peaceful sea in the distance, while in the foreground wooden waves broke with prim regularity and amazing precision at every turn of a crank.

Then clouds appeared on the horizon, growing quickly black, and it was plain that a storm was upon them. Fierce thunder roared and lightning flashed. The tiny light-house showed its signal in vain, the little ship rushed headlong to destruction and was tossed about among the breakers. Presently the ship sank, the storm passed by, and a beautiful yellow moon rose over the ocean so suddenly reduced to calmness.

A Day at Sea had drawn to a close, and the audience left the little theatre to find that a real moon had risen without upon a real ocean, shining in a path of glory over the unquiet water.

"It seems almost a pity to go in to see anything else and leave this," said Loraine, as, standing at the edge of the board-walk and leaning upon the railing, she gazed far out to sea.

"Doesn't it?" said Alan's voice beside her.

Loraine looked around in surprise, for she had supposed that Sidney was with her. It was most unusual for Alan voluntarily to enter into conversation with any one but her mother.

"Why, is that you?" she exclaimed.

"Who did you think it was?"

"Sidney, or one of the others. I never supposed that you would—" but before she had finished her sentence Alan had left her and followed the others.

"How stupid I am," thought Loraine, "and absolutely tactless! Any one else would have taken it as a matter of course and not shown any surprise, but of course I had to! I wish my face didn't show quite everything that I'm feeling, and of course, with this moonlight shining right on me, he saw just how amazed I was. And that was an idiotic thing to say! Mother would tell me that I haven't a particle of tact. And now he has left me all alone. Was there ever such a queer boy!"

She hastened as she supposed after the others, quite unconscious that she had turned in another direction from that in which they had gone.

"I wonder where they are," said Loraine to herself. "It is funny that I don't catch up to them. I don't even know what they were going to see next. The boys said something about a 'haze' or a 'maze,' I am sure I don't know which nor what in the world it can

be, and they also said they were going to see 'Cairo Street.' I will go on until I come to one of those places, and if they are not there waiting for me I will wait for them either to come out or go in. I haven't any money with me to pay for admission, so I shall have to wait outside."

And then she hurried on, feeling but a small atom of humanity among the hundreds who passed.

While Loraine and Alan had loitered in the moonlight in front of the Scenic Theatre, the others of the party had turned towards the next place of amusement on their programme for the evening, which happened to be the "Crystal Maze." When they reached the entrance and Mr. West counted those who were with him to make sure that all were there, he found that two were missing.

"Two short!" he exclaimed. "We should be ten and we are only eight. Who are they?"

"Loraine, for one," replied Janet.

"And Alan," added Sidney; "where do you suppose they are?"

"I saw them a-lookin' at the moon," piped Jimmy, who had been allowed to stay up to-night as an especial treat, and who had thus far let nothing escape his observation.

Every one laughed, and Mr. West remarked that he thought that perhaps they were better employed than any of the party, while Sidney asked Janet if she did not think that Loraine, Alan, and the moon were a remarkable combination.

"However," continued Mr. West, "I don't propose to wait here while those youngsters are star-gazing."

“Moon-gazing, Uncle Thad,” corrected Sidney; “but we needn’t wait, for Alan knows where we are and they will follow us. I told him we were coming here next, and he can pay for himself and Loraine and meet us in there. It will be all the more fun to have them try to find us in the Crystal Maze.”

So Mr. West bought the tickets and they all went in. Janet had never seen anything of this kind before, and the boys had all refrained from telling her what it was like; consequently, when she followed her sister through a narrow passage-way and suddenly found herself in an immense crowd of people, she looked about her with some curiosity.

She was still further astonished when she discovered that these people all closely resembled her own friends. Indeed, she was perfectly sure that she was standing by Cynthia, and yet there was Cynthia over there—and there—and there! In which direction should she turn? She tried to make her way to Neal, but he seemed to elude her; while as for Tom and Jimmy, they were everywhere at once.

Every one was talking and laughing, even those who had been to the place before being as completely bewildered as was Janet herself. She soon found that this confusion was caused by a clever arrangement of mirrors; but even after she had ascertained this fact it was no easier to trace her way, nor to be sure that the person whom she saw and wished to reach was really that person, or only his or her reflection in a looking-glass.

Presently she discovered Alan among the crowd, and she wished that she could meet Loraine and

ask her what she thought of it, but she did not see her.

"I sha'n't come across her, I suppose, until we get out, which is very provoking," said Janet to herself. "Charlie, if you see Loraine," she added, aloud, "tell her to try to find me."

But Charles, instead of being close beside her as she had fancied, was quite beyond hearing.

At last their wanderings came to an end, and the party emerged from the labyrinth and found themselves once more in the arcade which led to the board-walk, breathless with laughter and scarcely able to speak.

"I must count heads once more," said Uncle Thaddeus, suiting the action to the word. "One, two, three—only nine and we should be ten! I will count again to be sure. No, only nine. Who is missing?"


"It is Loraine," said Mrs. Gordon, looking about anxiously. "Janet, where is Loraine?"

"I don't know, I am sure," replied her sister. "I tried to find her while we were in there and couldn't. I supposed she was there somewhere. Hasn't any one seen her since we went in?"

"Alan, you were with her last," said Mr. West. "What did you do with her?"

A look of consternation passed over Alan's face. "Isn't she here?" he exclaimed. "I supposed she was right behind me."

"Well, you're a pretty fellow," said Sidney; "the idea of expecting a girl to come trotting along behind you! Why didn't you bring her along, as long as she was with you?"



Alan did not answer this question, but turned towards the door.

"I will go and look for her," he said.

"Wait a moment, Alan," said Neal Gordon; "it will be hard work to find her in this crowd. We had better organize and search for her with some method. Did she know that we were coming to the Crystal Maze?"

"I don't know. Yes, I suppose so."

"I think she did," said Janet. "She knew we were coming here some time. Oh, dear me, do you suppose she is lost, Neal?"

"She couldn't very well be lost, for she knows her way about, I suppose; but it isn't very pleasant for her to be alone in this crowd. Mr. West, what had we better do?"

"Some of us stay here," said Mr. West, "in case she comes here to find us. Let this be our headquarters. Gordon, you and Charlie and Tom might go to the right on the board-walk, while Sidney and Alan go to the left. I suppose I had better stay here with Mrs. Gordon and Janet and Jimmy, though I don't like being so inactive when my little Loraine is missing."

He stood in the entrance as he spoke and gazed eagerly at the people who were passing to and fro. There were some rough-looking men among them, and he shook his head anxiously.

"What did Alan mean by it?" he said to himself. "It wasn't courteous. I hope this will teach the lad to be better mannered. I must tell him that one of a man's highest privileges is chivalry."

Sidney and Alan had hastened together in the di-

rection designated by their uncle, starting at such a rate of speed that Loraine, had she been in the crowd which they met, might easily have overlooked them as well as they her. Suddenly Alan bethought himself of this, and cautioned Sidney to be more deliberate.

"We must go slowly," said he, "and each keep a sharp lookout on our own side. You look into the pavilions, for she may have sat down in one of them to rest, while I look at the shops and shows we pass, and we must both keep a sharp watch on the people. Of course she will probably be on the lookout for us."

"How did you ever happen to leave her behind, Al?" asked his cousin.

"Because I was an ass," was the reply, and Sidney did not contradict him.

Alan's brows were drawn closely together and his face wore a stern, set look as he tramped along the board-walk, looking eagerly at every one whom he passed, as well as beyond at the shops, in the hope of seeing the familiar figure of Loraine. He remembered that she wore a dark skirt, and she had put on her jacket when she came out of the little theatre, for the sea-breeze was almost cold.

She had on a little felt hat with a stiff wing in it, for he remembered that he had wondered why all girls did not wear such comfortable-looking hats as that, instead of the wide-brimmed affair that was forever flapping over Janet Franklin's face such a breezy night as this. It was rather unusual for Alan to notice girls' clothes at all, and he was surprised at himself for having done so. He had thought of this

when he paused at Loraine's side to look at the golden pathway which led across the water to the rising moon.

The moon was well up now, but it had gone behind some clouds and the beauty of the night was over, for a thick wall of fog had come in from the sea. He was provoked at himself for having been so stupid. What if Loraine was surprised at seeing him? She had every reason for being so, and that was no excuse for having left her alone. He gave no sign of this to Sidney, however.

"Girls are a terrible bore, anyhow," said he, aloud, as he scanned the passers-by. "I don't see why she couldn't have followed me to the Crystal Maze if she knew we were going there. Why do they have to be looked out for any more than a fellow does? They do pretty much what we do now, playing ball and riding wheels and a thousand other things that fellows do; why can't they look after themselves? Uncle Thad has such queer, old-fashioned notions about that sort of thing. It's absurd for us to be wasting our time looking for her, I believe!"

But in spite of this opinion he continued to stare into the face of every one whom he met. They walked far up the beach, but not meeting the object of their search the boys concluded that she had taken the other direction, and had perhaps by this time been found by the searchers who had gone to the right. On the strength of this opinion they turned and hurried back to the door of the Crystal Maze. Here they found Mrs. Gordon and Janet and Tom, but no Loraine.

"Haven't you found her?" cried the two sisters, as the boys approached. "Oh, where can she be? Mr. West has taken Jimmy to the hotel, for he was getting so tired," added Mrs. Gordon, "and he is going to see if Loraine is there. Neal and the boys have been back once, and now he and Charlie have gone again. We were so in hopes that you would bring her to us! Boys, where can she be?"

Sidney shook his head and looked at Alan.

"What had we better do now?" said he.

As he spoke Mr. West returned from his visit to the hotel.

"She isn't there," he announced, as he came within speaking distance. "It is certainly most mysterious and most alarming. Do any of you remember anything that Loraine may have said that would give us a clue to her whereabouts? Could she have thought we were going anywhere else and tried to follow us there?"

"Janet, do you know nothing?" asked Mrs. Gordon, turning to her sister with a gesture of despair.

"No, nothing; and I don't think Loraine had any money to pay to go in to any of the shows, for she asked me if I had, on our way down to the beach to-night, and I said I would lend her some, and then Mr. West paid for us everywhere, and so it wasn't necessary."

"I say!" exclaimed Tom, "I remember telling her that perhaps we would go see Cairo Street. Maybe she's looking for us up there!"

"That is away up the beach, isn't it?" asked Mr. West. "Boys, did you go that far?"

“No, we didn’t,” said Alan. “I will go now.”

And without waiting for further consultation he started on a run in the direction whence he had so recently returned. Mr. Gordon and Charles came back just then and presently the searching-party again divided, Charles staying with Mrs. Gordon and Janet in the pavilion opposite the Crystal Maze, while Uncle Thaddeus and Sidney went south on the board-walk, and Neal Gordon, with Tom, hastened northward after Alan.

He had far outstripped them, however. He had become suddenly very anxious, and he told himself candidly that if Loraine was in difficulty it was entirely his fault. If it had not been that he was an unmannerly bear she would not now be missing.

CHAPTER XII

ALAN walked quickly up the beach through the thickening fog. He did not stop now to look into the shops and pavilions along the way, for he felt sure that Loraine would not be in any of those places. Now that he knew that she had expected them to go to the Cairo show, he thought that she would be found not far from there, though why she had not returned to the part of the beach near which their hotel was situated he could not imagine. Alan had had so little experience with girls that he found it impossible sometimes to account for their seemingly extraordinary behavior.

The form of entertainment which was designated "Cairo Street" was held in a large booth far up the board-walk. It was supposed to be an exact reproduction of the Cairo Street of the World's Fair, but with the exception of a few cross camels and shouting Arabs there was little to suggest the resemblance. A large crowd was always attracted to this place of amusement, however, and on this particular night it seemed to Alan that more people than usual were to be encountered in this vicinity.

The glittering electric lights penetrated the fog sufficiently for him to distinguish the faces of those whom he met, at the same time giving so unnatural

an effect that it would be difficult to recognize suddenly even one whom he knew well.

He had almost reached the Cairo booth when among the hurrying figures who passed him he fancied that he saw one which was familiar. Surely that small, straight person in the dark suit was the one for whom he was searching. He had but a glimpse of the face, for its owner walked quickly, but he was quite sure that at last he had found Loraine. He turned and ran after her.

"Loraine," he called, "is that you? Loraine!"

The hurrying figure stopped and turned. She was directly under an electric light, which shone down upon her already pale face, making her look still whiter.

"Oh, Alan!" she cried; "is that you? I never was so thankful to see any one in my life!"

She held out her hand impulsively, and Alan shook it warmly.

"Well, I'm mighty glad to find you," he said, heartily. "We've been looking for you for the last hour. Where have you been?"

"Oh, I am so glad to see you!" repeated Loraine, as they walked on.

"I shouldn't think you would be," said he, "for I'm afraid it was all owing to me that you got lost."

Loraine glanced up at him and laughed. Then she said: "Five minutes ago I didn't suppose I should ever laugh again. But I don't think it was really your fault that I got lost, Alan. I must have stupidly turned the wrong way, and I didn't really know where you

were all going next. I am sorry if I have frightened them all."

"Oh, we have had a great time," returned he, "and the others are looking for you, too, and before we meet them, Loraine, I want to tell you that—at least, I think I ought to apologize for being so—oh, hang it! I can't say what I want to—I oughtn't to have left you the way I did."

"No," said Loraine, "you oughtn't."

"I don't know what makes me do those things."

"I don't, either."

"I should think you girls would hate me, and I dare say you do."

He paused, but Loraine did not contradict him.

"You do, don't you?"

"Well, to be honest," said Alan, "I think you might be a great deal nicer if you were to try. You know it is provoking sometimes to have you so gruff and—and disagreeable. I often feel like telling you to be different."

"I wish you would," said Alan, humbly.

Loraine was so surprised that she forgot to answer. She could scarcely believe that this was Alan Ransford. She began to understand why her mother liked the boy so much, which had never been possible before. The silence lasted for some minutes, and then Alan said:

"Why didn't you come back by yourself before? I shouldn't think you would have waited so long."

This remark was so totally unlike what he had already said, and his manner was also so different, that

Loraine was again greatly surprised. She was quite unprepared for being taken to task.

"Because I was frightened," said she. "I couldn't come alone."

"What frightened you?"

"Some rough boys."

"Oh, they wouldn't have hurt you! If you had just walked quietly along and not paid any attention to them you would have been all right."

"Indeed I wouldn't!" returned Loraine, indignantly; "I have had a dreadful time. It is all very well for you to say now what I ought to have done, but if you had been there and had been a girl you would know how very disagreeable it was. Oh, here are Mr. Gordon and Tom! I am *so* glad."

To Alan it seemed as if her tone showed more pleasure than it had done when she had met him. He did not like that idea, and he wondered why it should be. He had quite enjoyed the walk thus far, and Loraine had been so pleasant until he had told her she ought to have come before. Apparently she had not been pleased with this remark, and Alan wondered why he invariably said or did the wrong thing when he was with girls. He listened while she recounted her adventures to Mr. Gordon and Tom.

"It was really dreadful," said she. "I thought you were going to Cairo, or to some kind of a 'maze,' but as I could not remember the name I thought I had better try Cairo. After I had walked some distance and didn't come to either place, or see any of you, I asked the way to Cairo, and they said I was going all right. I got there at last, but it seemed

very far away, and then I waited outside. It wasn't very pleasant, for so many rough people were going in, and everybody stared so at a girl standing there all alone. I suppose I looked frightened."

"You poor child," said Mr. Gordon, "it couldn't have been at all pleasant."

"And then suddenly there was the greatest noise inside," continued Lorraine, "and everybody rushed out. I heard some one say that some of the camels had broken loose. At any rate, there was a great excitement, and some horrid boys were near who frightened me dreadfully, so I ran into a pavilion on the other side of the board-walk and stayed there. The fog hid me and I didn't dare come out and walk down alone for fear of their being there still. I thought some of you would be up here to look for me, but I waited so long and you didn't come, and then when I looked at my watch and found how late it was I thought I had better walk back alone. I suppose it was foolish of me not to have started before."

"Not at all," said Mr. Gordon. "This part of the board-walk is no place for a girl at night without some one with her. You did quite right to wait. I am only sorry that we were so long in finding you."

Lorraine could not resist glancing at Alan, who was stalking along in silence on the other side of Mr. Gordon. She could not see his expression very plainly in the fog, but she was quite sure that Mr. Gordon's opinion would carry weight with him.

"Then, after all, I did right to stay?" she asked.

"Certainly you did, but I am glad we have found

you now, for we have all been very much alarmed, and I think we had better walk as fast as possible to relieve the minds of the others. They are very anxious about you."

There was great rejoicing when the missing Loraine was restored to her friends, and as they all seemed to agree that her timidity had been quite excusable, Alan found himself in the minority. He was sorry now that he had taken Loraine to task. It would naturally lead her to suppose that he had not been anxious, that he had not been glad to find her, that he had begrudged the effort of looking for her.

This idea made him more distant even than before in his manner to Loraine, while she, disappointed by his relapse into a hostile attitude after his brief moment of friendliness, told Janet that she disliked him more than ever.

"The very idea of his taking me so to task!" said she; "and he had just been asking me to tell him when he did rude things. I verily believe I will! Hereafter I shall inform him whenever he does anything rude that I don't like. We will see what he says to that."

Janet laughed.

"How funny you are, Loraine! It is a great deal easier to take people as you find them, and, after all, Alan isn't half bad. He really has his good points. Sidney told me that before we came one day they were at the merry-go-round, and a lot of the little crippled children were there from the hospital, looking on and wishing they could ride. Alan saw them and gave them all the treat, and one who was dread-

fully crippled and couldn't ride on one of the animals he took himself in his arms and sat in the reindeer-sleigh with him, because the nurse who was with them said it made her dizzy to go round and there was no one else to do it. Didn't you see the children the day we met them on the board-walk? They all spoke to him and smiled at him. Sidney says he has the kindest heart in the world. Children and dogs always love him."

"Very likely," said Loraine, "but I do not, and it would take a great deal to make me even like him. He is rude to me, and I cannot endure rudeness."

"Oh, how absurd you are!" cried Janet, laughing again. "If Alan wants to be rude let him be rude, but I can tell you he was pretty well frightened when he thought you were lost. He really did look awfully frightened."

"I'm glad of it!" said Loraine, vindictively, "for it was entirely his fault; and if it hadn't been that I should have had to suffer myself, I wish that his fright could have lasted all night."

She proceeded to carry out to the letter these plans of hers, much to the amusement of Janet and Sidney, who were in the secret. She would purposely drop a book or a letter or whatever she happened to have in her hand whenever Alan was near, and if he did not immediately pick it up—which was apt to be the case—Loraine would say with great frigidity of manner:

"Alan, don't you see that I've dropped something? Please give it to me." Or, "It would be rather more

polite of you to pick up my book instead of letting me do it myself !”

It was not the pleasantest way of setting about her work of reform, nor one that was likely to be crowned with success. Alan objected, and with reason, to being thus publicly reprovèd, and in consequence he withdrew himself as much as possible from the society of Loraine and Janet. Whenever it was necessary for the whole party to be together, he walked or sat with Mrs. Gordon, who possessed the art of bringing out the best that was in him and who made him feel completely at his ease.

One day, about a week after the arrival of the Gordons and Loraine at Atlantic City, it happened that Janet was in the writing-room of the hotel hastily scribbling one of her rare letters to her sister at home, when Alan appeared in the doorway. The room was empty save for Janet, and seeing that it was only Alan she continued to write, for she did not suppose that he was looking for her. She noticed in her brief glance, however, that his face wore an unusual expression, though what it might mean she did not know, nor did it give her any concern whatever.

Presently Alan disappeared from the doorway, only to return in a few minutes. This time he came into the room.

“ Where is Loraine Lee ?” he asked.

“ I don’t know exactly,” said Janet, without looking up.

“ Haven’t you the least idea ?”

“ Oh, I suppose I have an idea,” returned Janet.

“ For instance, she might be up in our room, or she

might be on the piazza, or she might even be—let me see, s-i-e or s-e-i ? Alan, which comes first in ‘seize,’ the ‘i’ or the ‘e’ ? I’m sure I don’t know.”

“I don’t know either,” said Alan, speaking in what the girls called his most bearish voice ; “I wish you would tell me where Lorraine is.”

“But I don’t know exactly,” said Janet ; “how do I know just where she is at this particular minute ? She may be riding on the merry-go-round for all I know. Well, I shall just have to let this letter go to Edith with that word spelled wrong, since you won’t tell me. But what is the day of the month ? Will your royal highness condescend that far ?”

“Look here, Janet,” said Alan, approaching the writing-table and speaking with such emphasis that Janet was impressed in spite of herself, “if you know where Lorraine is I want you to tell me. I’ve been looking for her everywhere about the house and I can’t find her, high or low, and it is very important that I should see her. Do you hear ? Very important ! Now, where is she ? For I know that you know.”

“Mercy, how solemn you are !” replied Janet. “Tell me what you want to see her for ?”

“No, I won’t,” said Alan, roughly. “You will hear it soon enough. Just tell me, will you ?”

“Indeed I won’t, if you are as rude as all this ! If you had asked me politely I might have done so. I think Lorraine is quite right in her opinion of you. She calls you a bear, and that is just what you are.”

Having finished this speech, Janet again dipped her pen into the ink and began to write. Alan said noth-

ing, but his already troubled face grew darker. So that was what they thought him! Well, he did not care; let them consider him what they would. As it happened he had no better opinion of Loraine, and yet he must find her. He left the writing-room, and in the hall encountered his uncle and Jimmy.

"Have you any idea where Loraine Lee is?" he asked, though unwillingly, for he did not wish his uncle to know that he was actually seeking Loraine's society.

Uncle Thaddeus was delighted.

"No, I haven't, but I'll help you look for her, Alan, my boy. Nice girl, Loraine, and it will do all my boys good to be with her as much as possible. Let me see; have you looked for her on the piazza? I will walk around there now."

"Oh no, Uncle Thad, you needn't! It isn't worth while. I thought perhaps you had seen her."

"I guess I know where she is," said Jimmy. "She's gone down to the beach to sit in the sand and wait for Janet. I heard 'em fixing to meet there, a little way up towards the light-house."

"Good for you, Jimmy!" exclaimed Alan, as he hurried away.

"Now that is nice!" said innocent Uncle Thaddeus to himself. "This trip to Atlantic City has been a good thing, for it has shown Alan what nice creatures girls are. It is the only fault I can find in the boy, that he doesn't appreciate them. But he's learning to! He's learning to! It shows marked improvement that he is actually going to the beach to find Loraine."

Jimmy's bit of information had been correct. Loraine and Janet had agreed to meet on the sand that afternoon when Janet should have finished her letter, and they had determined to tell no one of their intention. The visit to Atlantic City was drawing to a close, and one of the chief regrets which this fact caused the two girls was that they should soon be obliged to separate.

"For even if we do live just around the corner from each other," said Janet, "it isn't like being in the same house and the same room, and doing everything together. And then—there is Ethel."

"Yes, there is Ethel," replied Loraine; adding hastily, "but I'm awfully fond of Ethel, Janet."

"Oh, so am I, but somehow I don't care to be with her all the time, and I don't like her as well as I do you, Loraine. But let us spend this afternoon together. Don't tell any of the boys, nor even Cynthia, where we are going, for we don't want to be disturbed. You go first if you don't want to wait until I have finished writing, and I'll come just as soon as I can. We won't attract so much attention, perhaps, if we don't go together. We can just slip off quietly."

They did not know that their plans for solitude were being overheard by Jimmy, who was playing with his tin soldiers in the same room.

It was a beautiful afternoon. Fleecy clouds flecked the blue sky here and there, and the strong breeze which blew across the water made dancing whitecaps as far as the eye could reach, and sent scudding merrily over the sea the boats which sailed to and from the inlet. There were craft of all kinds to be seen

this afternoon, from the heavily laden coal-steamers, looming in the distance and moving slowly but surely to their destined ports, to the schooners and sloops and cat-boats, with their gleaming sails and their graceful dip into the restless water.

The tide was low, and Loraine walked up the beach over the smooth, hard sand until she had gained a spot which was quite beyond the throngs of people who frequented the lower part. The board-walk, with those who passed over it, was some distance back from the water at this part of the beach, and consequently the place seemed more primitive and nearer to Nature than it was lower down.

There were not many people about, for it was early in the afternoon. A few children were playing near, digging wells and building houses in the sand while their nurses gossiped together at a little distance, but the childish voices only added to the charm of the spot.

Loraine piled up a heap of sand to make a comfortable seat for herself, over which she threw the shawl which she had brought, and, this done, she settled herself for a delightful afternoon. She had a book to read until Janet should come, but the day was so beautiful and there was so much to be seen on the ocean, while the little sand-birds which hopped and ran about on the sand were so fascinating to watch, that she forgot to open the book.

She sat there, lost in thought and quite forgetful that there was such a disagreeable person as Alan Ransford in the world, until a shadow fell across the sand in front of her, and she became conscious that some one was near.



" SHE SAT THERE, LOST IN THOUGHT "

"Oh, you have come at last!" said she, without looking around. "It is the most perfect afternoon and this is the most perfect peace, Janet! We shall have a good talk without danger of being disturbed by any one."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you," said a voice which was not the one she expected. "It isn't Janet, and I'm sure I didn't want to come after you, but I had to."

Lorraine started and looked up.

"Oh!" she exclaimed in disappointed tones. "Then what *did* you come for?"

"Because I had to, I tell you," said Alan. "I'm sure I wouldn't have done it if I could have helped it. I want you to explain yourself."

"What do you mean?" asked Lorraine, icily; "I don't in the least understand you."

"I can soon make you understand," said Alan, who was searching one pocket after another. "You have done an awful lot of mischief, and I want to know how much of the story is true and what it all means. You think that I'm rude, and a bear, and everything else that's disagreeable, but at least I'm truthful, and I don't spread reports and tell stories to amuse people. But here is a letter that I've just received."

He pulled the letter from his pocket, and, drawing it from its envelope, he opened it and gave it to Lorraine to read.

CHAPTER XIII

LORAINÉ took the letter. She glanced at the signature and found that it was from Harry Browning, a Germantown boy whom she knew to be an intimate friend of Alan's. The letter ran thus :

"DEAR AL,—Haven't been able to write before, for the tennis tournament is on and have had all I could do. Too bad you are missing it. Hope you will be home in time for the English cricketers. They play here next week. Are playing at the Merion now. Glad you're having such a good time. So is your uncle. What do you think of his engagement? Everybody is talking about it in Germantown and at the Hill, for it has just got out, and that Loraine Lee heard it in the tree. Get her to tell you the story the way she told Ethel Foster. It's the most killing thing I ever listened to. By-the-way, I got beaten in the finals yesterday, 6-0, 6-1. Terrible whitewash. I don't know what was the matter with me.

"I've put off that sad confession to the end of the letter, and now hastily sign my name. Yours faithfully,

"HARRY."

As Loraine read this note an icy coldness stole over her and she felt the blood receding from her face. She did not dare look up at Alan, who was watching her, she knew. She sat with her head bent over the letter reading it again and again, though already the words were stamped indelibly upon her brain.

"Loraine Lee heard it in the tree. Get her to

tell you the story the way she told it to Ethel Foster."

So that was what Ethel had done, repeated the tale which had been imparted to her only under promise of the strictest secrecy! Oh, that she had never told her! But, after all, she was not the first to tell her—after all, it was not *her* fault that Ethel knew it! She had not intended to say a word about it until she found that Janet had told. It was Janet who was responsible, and not herself. She looked up eagerly.

"Alan, it really wasn't I in the first place," she said; "it was Janet. She told Ethel about it!"

"That is exactly my idea of a girl," said Alan, scornfully; "you are trying to put it on some one else! What does Harry mean, then, by saying that you heard it, and for me to get you to tell me the story? It was you, and not Janet. You ought to be ashamed to try and crawl out of it that way!"

Lorraine's paleness vanished, and she was now crimson with mortification and anger. Every word that Alan spoke struck home, for she knew that it had been both cowardly and unfair to implicate Janet, but she was also very angry with Alan for venturing to tell her this.

"I don't think you have any right to speak to me so," said she.

"I have every right," replied Alan, stormily. "You are telling people something about my uncle that turns him into ridicule. You have made him the laughing-stock of Germantown. I don't like my uncle Simon, but I'm not going to have him made fun of by outsiders, I can tell you! Now, I want to

know what the story is. If he is engaged we don't know it and Uncle Thaddeus doesn't know it. The mere idea of Uncle Simon being engaged is too ridiculous to give a second thought to, but I would like to know what the story is that you've been telling."

"What are you two people quarrelling about?" cried a new voice, as Janet came quickly over the sand. "Alan, how did you manage to find her, and what are you scolding about? I heard your voice ever so far off, and it sounded as cross as two sticks. Here are some letters for you, Loraine. What *is* the matter?"

"A great deal," said Alan; "and as Loraine has just told me that it was your fault in the beginning, perhaps you can explain it. I've just had a letter from Harry Browning, who says that every one is talking about my uncle Simon's engagement, and to get Loraine to tell me the way she told Ethel Foster. Now, I didn't even know—"

He was interrupted by Janet.

"Why, Loraine!" she cried; "did you tell? I thought you weren't going to mention it to any one!"

"And I never should have done so if you hadn't told Ethel about it first yourself!" exclaimed Loraine, raising her flushed and troubled face.

"I told her? I never told her," said Janet, indignantly. "What do you mean, Loraine? I met Ethel that night on my way home and she tried to get out of me what we had been doing, and I didn't tell her a word. Did she try to make you think that I had?"

Lorraine did not answer. She could only gaze at Janet, quite speechless with surprise and dismay.

"Well, I do wish you would have the goodness to tell me what it is all about," said Alan, with some impatience. "I think I ought to be told what these stories are."

"I will tell you," said Janet. "The Sunday afternoon before we came down here Lorraine and I were up in the platform of the old tree. We went to sleep, and when we woke up your uncle Simon was in the midst of proposing to Mrs. Grafton."

"Mrs. Grafton!" repeated Alan, utterly unable to believe this astounding tale.

"Yes, Mrs. Grafton; and it was the funniest thing you ever listened to! I only wish you could have heard it. We got perfectly convulsed with laughter, but of course we couldn't let them know we were there. We agreed to say nothing about it, but it seems that Lorraine has told Ethel Foster, thinking that I had. It is very queer."

"But, Janet, do you really mean that Uncle Simon is going to marry Mrs. Grafton?"

"I really do. Isn't it terrible?"

"Terrible! I should say so. I must go right back to the hotel and tell Uncle Thaddeus. I'm much obliged to you, Janet, for giving me a clear account of it, and for *not* having told any one else!"

He looked at Lorraine with an angry scowl, having said this, and then, turning on his heel, he walked quickly away over the beach, leaving the two girls alone together.

"Do you mean to say," asked Lorraine, as soon as

Alan was out of hearing, "that you didn't tell Ethel anything about it?"

"Indeed I do," replied Janet. "I remember exactly how it was. Ethel met me when I was going home from your house that afternoon, and said, 'You look awfully amused about something. What is it?' Of course I said, 'Oh, nothing!' but she was very curious about it, and asked me where I had been and what we had been doing and everything else, and she found out that something had been happening, only she didn't know what. I didn't tell you how curious she was, because she is a friend of yours and I thought you mightn't like it."

"But she is a friend of yours, too, Janet!" said Loraine, quickly.

"Not as much as she is of yours. I go with her, of course, because she is with us so much, and just to take the opposite from Cynthia. Cynthia is so dreadfully prejudiced against her, you know, and won't have her at the house. I wasn't going to acknowledge to Cynthia that I agreed with her, for we've had the most tremendous arguments on the subject; but to tell you the truth, Loraine, I don't really care much for Ethel, and I'm afraid she has done an awful lot of mischief."

Loraine did not reply. She leaned back against the pile of sand and gazed far out to sea. Where was now the beauty of the afternoon? The sails dipped just as gayly, the whitecaps broke with the same dancing joyousness, the little sand-pipers ran over the beach precisely as they had been doing before, but for Loraine all was changed.

She had made mischief with her idle tale-bearing;

she had implicated Janet when there had been no need of doing so, and when Janet was quite innocent ; she had discovered that one whom she had believed to be a friend was not worthy of the name ; and—and this thought rankled—she had done much to confirm Alan in his opinion of girls and to prejudice him still more deeply against them.

The day was no longer beautiful to her. It was as if all the merry sunshine had been shut out by a thick gray wall of fog.

“But come,” said Janet, seating herself beside Lorraine, “there’s no use in worrying about it ! The mischief is done, so let it go.”

“Oh, Janet, how can you say so ? I would like to hide myself forever ! What will father and mother say ? And Uncle Thaddeus ? Oh, and everybody ? Here is my name entirely connected with the story. Do you know, Janet, I feel as if I could never, never forgive Ethel Foster.”

“Oh, there’s no use in feeling that way. Of course she is mean and deceitful, but what’s the use of bothering about her ? Let her go, and don’t have any thing more to do with her. We will just drop her.”

“It is easy to say we will drop her, but that doesn’t mend the awful harm she has done. I wonder if they have heard the story at home.”

“You haven’t read the letters I brought you. Perhaps they will tell you. The mail came in just after you left, and I suppose Harry Browning’s letter to Alan came then, too. I wonder how he found you. I didn’t tell him where you were, though he

tried to find out from me. He looked as if he were going to make a row about something."

Lorraine tore open one of her letters. Then she let it drop into her lap.

"I can't get over Ethel Foster," said she, looking at Janet with wide eyes. "She certainly told me that you had told her the story, for I remember saying to her that if you had told her there was no need of my doing so, and then she said she wanted to hear my account of it. Why, Janet, she is the most deceitful girl that ever lived!"

"I know it, but hurry up and read your letters, Lorraine, and don't waste any more time over Ethel."

Thus urged, Lorraine did as she was bidden, and hastily perused the two letters which Janet had brought her. One was from her father, the other from her mother. She opened her father's first. It was long and pleasant, making no mention of the subject which filled Lorraine's mind. He told her various items of interest, an account of the tennis tournament and the coming cricket-matches, and small bits of home news, but not a word about the engagement in the family. Lorraine read it through hastily, and then opened her mother's:

"MY DEAREST LORRAINE,—We have just heard the most extraordinary news, and it came from outside the family in the first place. Mrs. Crane has been here and told me that it is commonly reported that Cousin Evelina is engaged to Mr. Simon West, and that *you* overheard the proposal! My dear daughter, I cannot believe that this is true. Even if you did hear it, which is not probable, I cannot for an instant think that you would tell outsiders of it and not mention it to your

mother. I have more confidence in my little Lorraine than that, though how such a story has gotten about I cannot imagine.

"Cousin Evelina acknowledges that she is going to marry Mr. West. I am more amazed than I can express, and so is your father. They have kept very quiet about it, and are much surprised that any one has heard it. Your name in connection with it is a mystery. I think, my dear, I should like to have you come home. Letters are unsatisfactory, and I want to hear from yourself what all this means.


"Your visit is nearly at an end, and a day or two sooner will not make a great deal of difference, so suppose you come up to-morrow morning, in the nine-o'clock train. Your father will meet you in Camden. He wrote to you himself to-day, and had just posted the letter when Mrs. Crane came in and told us the strange story. As soon as she had gone I went to Cousin Evelina and asked her if there were any truth at all in it, and she, after much circumlocution, acknowledged that there was.

"Remember, dear, that your mother has perfect confidence in you, and is sure that you have done nothing of which you need be ashamed, but she wants to see you. Your father sends love, and so does your loving

MOTHER."

This letter was the finishing touch. Lorraine bowed her head upon her knees and gave way to the sobs which had been struggling for utterance for the last half-hour. She cried as if her heart would break, and Janet soon found that it was useless to try to calm her, for Lorraine must let her grief, her mortification, and her anger have their way.

Janet sat beside her and occasionally stroked her hand or her hair, but to her this excess of emotion was incomprehensible. She was quite sure that she would not have cared so deeply herself, but she supposed that she must be different from other girls in



that respect. Things which to them were of vital importance seemed to slide easily from her. On the whole, she was rather glad. It must be a great bore, she thought, to be constantly stirred up about something.

Of course this affair was rather unfortunate. It certainly was not very nice to feel that your name was mentioned as the author of a piece of gossip that was being told everywhere, and then Mrs. Lee, whose letter Loraine had given her to read, was so confident of her daughter's innocence that it made matters all the worse. No, Janet thought that even she would feel badly about this affair, and she stroked Loraine's head with added tenderness to show her sympathy.

In the meantime Alan had hastened back to the hotel. On the way he encountered Sidney, who was coming in search of him. They met on the street which led from the beach to the hotel.

"Holloa!" called Sidney, hailing his cousin while they were yet some distance apart; "I was just trying to find you. Jimmy said you had gone after the girls, and Uncle Thad is tickled to death over it."

"Gone after the girls!" repeated Alan. "I never want to see a girl again. I wash my hands of them. Of all the mischief-making, troublesome, tiresome, utterly useless—"

"Hold on, Al! Don't waste your breath with that string of adjectives. What's the matter now?"

"Matter enough. Where's Uncle Thad?"

"In the reading-room. What do you want him for?"

"Sidney, what do you suppose I've heard, and it's true, too? Uncle Simon is going to be married!"

Sidney stared at him for a moment without speaking. The two boys were standing together on the sidewalk in front of the hotel. Then he began to shout with laughter.

"There's something wrong with you up here, Al," he said, tapping his own forehead. "There certainly is."

"I beg your pardon!" returned his cousin. "If you don't believe me, go ask those precious girls you think so much of. They will tell you it is true. And read this," giving him Harry Browning's letter.

Sidney read it through.

"But whom is it to?" he asked, when he had finished.

"Mrs. Grafton!" And saying this, Alan turned and ran up the piazza steps, leaving Sidney to recover himself as best he could.

He found his uncle, as Sidney had said, in the reading-room, enjoying his pipe while he glanced over the daily papers.

"Uncle Thad, I want to speak to you," he said. "Would you mind coming somewhere where we won't be overheard?"

"Why no, my dear boy, of course I shouldn't," said Mr. West. "I hope nothing is the matter? You look as if there were. Jimmy hasn't broken another arm, has he, or anything of that sort?"

He was busily knocking the ashes from his pipe as he spoke, and now he rose to his great height and followed Alan from the room.

"Let us go up-stairs," said his nephew, "to your

room. I want to speak to you very privately. Sidney, bring that letter, please."

Sidney, with a face in which dismay and amusement struggled for the mastery, had met them at the door of the reading-room. The three now went quickly up the broad staircase to Mr. West's room, and when they had entered Alan shut the door and locked it, at the same time closing the ventilator at the top.

"It won't do for any one to hear us," he said.

"But, Alan, my dear boy, what is it?" asked Mr. West. "You are as solemn as if you were going to tell me of a death in the family."

"It's about as bad, Uncle Thad," returned Alan. "Have you heard anything from Uncle Simon?"

"Not a word!" cried Thaddeus, starting to his feet. "Is anything wrong with him? I thought it was strange he hadn't written for so long. Not a line from him for more than a week, and then merely a postal-card to tell me not to come home. What is it, Alan? Tell me quickly, my boy! There is nothing wrong with Simon?"

"Very wrong," replied Alan, grimly. "He is going to be married."

"What!" shouted Mr. Thaddeus West, with the voice of a giant.

"He is going to be married," repeated his nephew.

"I don't believe it! Alan, I don't believe it! Your uncle Simon? Why, I tell you, I don't believe it!" roared Mr. West, his great voice gathering volume with each repetition of the phrase. The boys had never seen him so excited.

"But it is true, Uncle Thad. I wouldn't have told

you if I hadn't been sure it was true. Harry Browning wrote me about it first, and then I asked Loraine Lee. She heard Uncle Simon asking her."

"Asking whom?"

"Mrs. Grafton. Oh, I forgot to tell you whom it is to. He is going to marry Mrs. Grafton."

"Mrs. Grafton! He is going to marry Mrs. Grafton! Not that chattering widow with the untidy hair? Oh, this is too much, boys, this is really too much! And you say it is true. How extraordinary for Simon not to tell me. He is afraid of me! He knows I won't let him do it. I must go right home and stop proceedings at once. I won't let him marry her. But tell me again how you heard it. You say Loraine overheard him asking the very question—little Loraine?"

"Yes, 'little Loraine,'" said Alan, with a scornful emphasis upon the name. "Harry Browning wrote me about it. Here is the letter."

He gave it to his uncle, who read it through.

"Boys," said he, when he had finished it, "this must be stopped. We will go home at once—this very afternoon."

But they found upon investigation that this would be so difficult to accomplish as to make it scarcely worth while. It was now after five o'clock. The party was scattered, the younger boys had betaken themselves to some remote resort and could not be found, Mr. and Mrs. Gordon had gone to drive, the girls, whom Mr. West wished to question, had not yet returned from the beach.

It would be late when they reached Philadelphia,

and very late indeed when they should arrive at Germantown. After all, it seemed useless to hurry away that night. By taking an early morning train they would be at home before twelve o'clock the next day.

"And perhaps I shall feel calmer after sleeping on the news," said Mr. West. "After all, boys, we will wait until the morning. It will not make a great deal of difference."


But he knew not of what he spoke. That brief delay made all the difference in the world.

CHAPTER XIV

It was almost noon of the following day when Mr. Thaddeus West and his five nephews reached home after their month's sojourn at Atlantic City. Upon learning that the Wests and Loraine Lee were about to leave, Mr. and Mrs. Gordon had decided to do likewise, consequently the whole party were on the train which Mr. Lee met in Camden, instead of Loraine only, whom he expected.

Mr. West had heard from Loraine the night before a full account of the share which she had taken in spreading the report of his brother's engagement, and when he saw her heart-felt regret he had refrained from making much comment upon the harm which she had done.

Loraine was greatly comforted by this, and also by the kind sympathy of Mrs. Gordon, who, while she did not hesitate to tell Loraine plainly that she had done wrong, at the same time helped her to a more cheerful frame of mind. It was a very solemn little person, however, who greeted her father upon her arrival, and Mr. Lee, looking at her with anxious scrutiny, wondered if there could be some truth, after all, in the reports which associated his daughter's name with the gossip which was now rife; but he waited until they should get home to discuss the matter.



He appeared not to notice Loraine's silence as they sat together in the Germantown train, so different from her usual gayety upon her return from an outing. Loraine and her father were very dear to one another, and she longed for the time to come when she could give him the history of all her troubles; but it was impossible for her to do so in the train, and her heart was too full to allow her to talk upon less important subjects.

It was almost noon, then, when Mr. Thaddeus West and his five nephews walked up the path to their own front door—the door to which Thaddeus had returned for thirty years, but never with such feelings of anxiety and dismay as those which filled his breast to-day.

His first inquiry was for his brother, who, strangely enough, was not there to greet him. Thaddeus had supposed that after a month's separation Simon would at least be in the library, if not at the door. He had telegraphed him the night before that they were coming home, for he knew that Simon disliked being taken by surprise.

He was not there, however, and upon inquiring of Phœbe and the other servants as to his whereabouts Mr. Thaddeus was told that Mr. Simon had gone to the city. This seemed a strange and unusual proceeding, and the mystery of it was heightened still further when Phœbe added the information that he had taken his large valise.

Now as Mr. Simon had never in his life been known to go to the city burdened with his large valise unless he intended to remain for some days, which was of rare occurrence, this item of news was of no small

significance, a fact which the servants were not slow to realize. To Phœbe, being the oldest and the most important of the domestics, was conceded the honor of telling it, and she made the most of the distinction.

“Mr. Simon has gone to town, Mr. Thaddeus. No, he ain’t in the museum, as you’d be likely to think. He’s gone to town, I tell you, and, what’s more, he’s took his great valise, the biggest of ’em all as is in the trunk-room. Of course, it ain’t for me to say, but I shouldn’t be surprised if we wasn’t to see him again this good while. Oh, them designin’ widder women !” she added with a virtuous sniff, half under her breath.

It was just then that Mr. and Mrs. Lee made their appearance at the door and asked Mr. West if they could see him alone. The three stepped into the library and the door was closed upon the five nephews and the three servants, who were left to draw their own conclusions therefrom.

“Thaddeus, my dear fellow,” said Mr. Lee, “I have a bit of news for you which I am afraid you won’t relish. Perhaps you have heard what it is already?”

“I have not heard it, but I can guess what it is,” said Mr. West. “I am fully prepared for the worst. You are going to tell me that Simon, my only brother, Simon—” Here he paused, for his voice shook with an emotion which he tried in vain to conceal.

“That is just it,” said Mr. Lee ; “Simon—” then he, too, paused, unable to utter the fatal word.

“Is by this time married,” said Mrs. Lee, finishing

her husband's sentence. And then the three looked at one another, while the two men wrung each other by the hand.

"Well," said Mr. West, presently, "I suppose worse things could happen, but at this moment I don't seem able to imagine what they could be. And to have him do it in this way! Oh, Simon!"

He covered his eyes with his hand for a moment.

"Did you know it this morning, Dick?" he asked.

"Indeed I did not! That is, I didn't know it was to be so soon. Of course I knew that he had become engaged. When we got home ten minutes ago, Mrs. Lee told me that Mrs. Grafton had departed an hour after I went to town and had told her that she was going to be married."

"Oh that I had come last night!" murmured Thaddeus.

"I doubt if you could have stopped it, Mr. West," said Mrs. Lee. "Their minds were quite made up, and any opposition seemed to strengthen them in their determination."

"I could have stopped it," said Mr. West. "Simon was—well, to speak candidly, a little afraid of me. That is the reason he hurried off to-day before we got home, I'm sure. I always could influence him when no one else could, and I believe it never would have come about if I had not gone to Atlantic City. Oh, Jimmy, Jimmy! Why did you break your arm? Well—" straightening himself and trying to appear cheerful, "what is done can't be undone—that is, if it is really done. What o'clock is it? No use in going after them, is there? But I forgot, they are

both of age are they not?" This with an attempt at merriment which was truly pathetic.

"No, it is done by this time," said Mrs. Lee. "It is an extraordinary affair altogether. I cannot imagine what your brother finds attractive in my cousin, but there is no accounting for that sort of thing. And now I must run home again. I am truly sorry, Mr. West, that this misfortune should have come to you through a relative of ours."

"My dear madam, it was bound to come, bound to come!" said Thaddeus. "I never supposed that Simon would marry. I thought his collections would be enough for him, but it seems they were not. And it is not that I have any personal dislike for your cousin," fearing that he had been discourteous; "I have no doubt that she is a most estimable lady, but matrimony is a terrible risk—a terrible risk—and they have known each other such a short time; and then—I suppose they will live here and—well, I am an old bachelor and a very set one, I fear! And one word more. Please don't censure my little Loraine too severely for her share in this affair. She is sorry enough as it is, and it's all over now, and scolding won't help it."

He bowed his neighbors out of the front door, and then, returning to his library, he again shut himself in and sat down to review the situation.

That afternoon there came a letter from Simon informing his brother in a few words that he was married, that he had concluded to carry out his intentions without waiting for Thaddeus to come home, and that he and his bride would be with them in a week.

"It will make no more difference in the household than would another nephew," wrote Simon, "and you know that if there were another to be found you would insist upon adopting him. Therefore I feel quite justified in taking this step."

It was a curious mode of reasoning, Thaddeus thought, but then Simon always was more or less peculiar. So they were to have one more week of freedom, and then—!

Immediately upon her return Loraine had a long conversation with her father and mother. Although they were greatly distressed to learn that their daughter was really the author of the story of Mr. West's offer, which had by this time become greatly exaggerated, they were inclined to judge her more leniently than she had hoped.

"I see how it was," said Mrs. Lee. "You were drawn into telling the story to Ethel Foster. Of course you should not have been. You should have been firm enough to withstand the temptation even after you thought Janet had already told it, but your mistake was a natural one. It was a very amusing story, I admit, but, my dear child, a conversation of that kind is about the most confidential that any two people can have, and if it is overheard inadvertently by a third person, that person ought to guard the secret even more carefully than she would one of her own. You know, dear, I have told you before that Ethel Foster is not a safe friend. I have never liked her, but you thought you knew her better than I did and that I was unjust, didn't you, Loraine, dear?"

"Yes, I did," acknowledged Loraine.

"I thought you would find it out for yourself sooner or later, but I am sorry that this particular occurrence was necessary to bring it about. One does not like to implicate one's neighbors."

"I feel as if I never wanted to speak to Ethel Foster again!" exclaimed Loraine, vindictively. "She promised that she would never tell, and she immediately went and did it."

"After all," said Mr. Lee, "is she so very different from my daughter Loraine? She promised she would never tell, and she immediately 'went and did it?'"

"But, father, I thought Janet had told her, and that makes some difference."

"True, but perhaps Ethel had an equally good excuse. Now, mind, I'm not excusing Ethel myself, and I agree with your mother that she is far from being a desirable companion for you; but I think you were very much to blame, and I want you to realize it and learn something from the lesson."

Their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of a maid who brought a note to Loraine. It was from Janet, who told her that she had been deputed by her sister Cynthia to invite Loraine to drive with them to Haverford that afternoon.

"Cynthia found an invitation from Mr. Saunders," wrote Janet, "to fill his coach this afternoon and go over to the cricket-match. You know the Englishmen are playing at the Merion Club, and it will be well worth seeing. Mr. Saunders thought we were already at home. We shall be late getting there, but it will be better than nothing. Cynthia is asking Mr.

Thaddeus West and Alan and Sidney, for she thinks their minds ought to be diverted. Be sure to come. We will call for you at two o'clock."

"Can I go, mother?" cried Loraine, eagerly, when she had read this missive. "It would be too perfect; but perhaps you will think I don't deserve it."

"Oh, run along and have a good time," said her father. "As Thaddeus himself said a short time ago, what's done can't be undone, and we know you are sorry, don't we, Helen?" turning to his wife.

"Yes, we know that," said Mrs. Lee; "but oh, Loraine, do be careful about repeating things in future! It is sure to do mischief; and though I suppose Mr. West and Cousin Evelina would have carried out their plans eventually, this gossip undoubtedly hastened matters, and *perhaps* Mr. Thaddeus might have been able to prevent it."

Loraine had barely had time to change her dress and put on her prettiest hat and jacket when the merry sound of a horn was heard, and with much prancing of horses and glitter of harness Mr. Saunders's four-in-hand swept around the corner and drew up with a flourish in front of the Lees' house.

On the coach were Mr. Saunders and Mr. and Mrs. Gordon, with one or two other friends and Janet. Mr. West had declined going, but Alan and Sidney were ready—Alan's disinclination to going with Loraine overbalanced by his desire to see the cricket-match; and presently they had all climbed up to the top of the coach, and with another toot-toot of the horn they were off.


It was a cool September afternoon, clear and golden,

as only a September day can be. The foliage had as yet scarcely begun to turn, but the blossoming sumach, the golden-rod, and the asters proved that autumn was here, and the very blue of the sky suggested September. Away they went, following the course of the Wissahickon until the little stream emptied itself into the Schuylkill River, which winds down, fulfilling its destiny of mingled usefulness and beauty, from the coal lands in the interior of the State to the city of Philadelphia, with its pleasure parks and its factories, its spires and its brick walls; beyond which the little river, grown wider and bolder now, empties itself in its turn into the broad and stately Delaware.

Fairmount Park, through which they drove, was crowded with carriages; bicycles darted up and down the river-road; parties of children romped on the playgrounds, while their elders rested on the benches or wandered over the green. It was a Saturday afternoon and a holiday for many, and it seemed as though half the city had come out to this great breathing-space.

And presently the park was left behind and the four horses were trotting swiftly over a hard, straight road, past beautiful country places with carefully kept grounds, past old houses with their subdued atmosphere of age and respectability, past modern ones with their glaring newness, until finally Haverford was reached and they had stopped in front of the Merion Club.

Here a vast number of people were gathered and were watching with breathless interest the figures in



white that dotted the smooth turf, which seemed to stretch its velvet surface as far as the eye could reach—a long sweep of restful green. After moments of intense silence, enthusiastic cheers and the mildly exhilarating sound of clapping hands would break forth from this audience, encouraging to further success the man who was at the bat and who had just accomplished some extraordinary number of runs.

It was all very interesting and exciting, and Loraine, who had enjoyed the drive over in spite of her troubles, soon became completely absorbed in watching the match. It was during the intermission, when she and Janet and Sidney were walking about the grounds, that they encountered Ethel Foster.

“Why, have you come home?” cried Ethel. “I am so delighted to see you! Loraine, you never told me you were coming so soon. Did you have a good time at Atlantic City?”

Ethel was elaborately dressed, and her large black hat, with its many feathers, afforded ample shield for her eyes, with which she rapidly scanned first one and then the other of the three while she shook hands with each.

“What is the matter?” she continued. “You all look so cross I think you must have been having a fight, or else you didn’t have a good time, after all.”

“May I speak to you a second, Ethel?” said Loraine, acting upon an impulse born of the moment. “Janet, you and Sidney go on, and I will come back to the coach when the game begins again.”

The others did as they were bidden, although they remarked to one another as they walked away that

they thought Loraine was "a great goose" to have anything more to do with Ethel; and the two girls were left alone.

"How dear of you!" said Ethel, slipping her arm through Loraine's; "I wanted to see you alone dreadfully. Let us walk over to that part of the grounds where there are not many people, for I must say something to you. I suppose you have heard about the story getting out—the story you told me about Mr. West."

"I should think I had," replied Loraine, who, though she did not want Ethel to take her arm, did not know how to prevent it; "and I should like to know, Ethel, what you mean by it all?"

"What *I* mean!" repeated Ethel, with an assumption of surprise. "Why, my dear child, surely you are not accusing *me* of telling it?"

"Indeed I am," said Loraine, "for who else could have told it? You are the only one who knew anything about it."

"The *only* one?" said Ethel, significantly.

"The only one except Janet and me."

"Ah, yes, but that is a big exception! You don't seem to remember that Janet has a tongue as well as any one else."

"But Janet hasn't told any one," said Loraine, eagerly; "she didn't even tell you, though I'm sure I understood from what you said that she had told you."

"It seems as if you would rather believe what she says than what I say," said Ethel, with extreme coldness. "If that is the case, the less you see of me the

better, but I must say I am surprised at you, Loraine! You knew me long before you knew Janet Franklin, and I must say I should think you would believe me."

"But did she really tell you, Ethel?"

"I am not going to answer. I'm not accustomed to having my word doubted."

"Dear me," said Loraine, miserably, "I'm sure I don't know what to think! But at least you must have told the story to some one else, for it got all over the place while Janet was at Atlantic City, so she couldn't have been the one."

"I heard it from some one else first," replied Ethel. "That is, I heard that Mr. West was very devoted to Mrs. Grafton, and people were laughing about it, and from the way it was told to me I knew at once that they had heard the story of the tree, and so I told it, too, the way you described it to me. It was such an awfully good story, Loraine, I could not resist repeating it and giving you the credit for it. Everybody thinks you must be awfully clever and bright to have told it so well. But the game is going to begin again, so we must go back. Only, say that you believe me, Loraine! I can't bear to have you doubt me."

"I don't know what to think," said Loraine again, which was indeed the case.

She could not bear to doubt Janet, and yet Ethel appeared to be speaking the truth. Ethel had always possessed a strange fascination for Loraine. If she had tried to analyze the feeling she would not have been able to say why she cared for her society. Perhaps it was partly because Ethel seemed to be so fond



"THE SWAYING COACH DASHED UP THE WISSAHICKON ROAD"

of her. She was a little older, and that is always an attraction for a girl of Loraine's age, and she invariably gave Loraine to understand that she considered her quite the most charming and the cleverest girl of her acquaintance ; and to feel that a friend entertains that opinion of one, even though one knows it to be undeserved, always inclines one to like the friend in return.

Perhaps the very fact that her family did not fancy Ethel fostered a little opposition in Loraine's mind and led her to greater lengths than she would otherwise have gone. At any rate, and whatever the cause, Loraine was very easily influenced by Ethel, and on this occasion she went back to her seat next to Janet wondering which of the two was to be believed.

Ethel, on her part, felt quite satisfied with the effect of her words. She had not actually said what was not true, she told herself. This was the way in which she argued :

Even though Janet had not actually told her of the occurrence, it was easy to see, that Sunday afternoon when the two girls had met, that something funny had been happening. Janet had laughed immoderately and had not hesitated to arouse her curiosity, and had told her that she and Loraine had been up in the tree.

She had easily gathered that the amusing scene, whatever it was, had been witnessed from the tree, and so she felt justified in saying to Loraine the next day that Janet had told her something of it ; and now, at this distance of time, she imagined that Janet had told her even more than she had done. It is not in

the least difficult to exaggerate when one is trying to defend one's self, and it is to be feared that the best of us do it occasionally.

Then in regard to the spreading of the news. Somebody had said that if it were really an engagement between Mr. Simon West and Mrs. Grafton, how amusing his proposal must have been, which very soon served Ethel as an excuse for telling Loraine's story, regardless of her promise of secrecy, and she did not feel now that she had been untruthful in her account to Loraine of the way in which it had come about.

At last the match was over, and again the horses were put to the coach and the horn sounded. The four-in-hand started at their smartest trot, and Haverford was left behind. Loraine was very silent, and although she sat next to Janet she had little to say to her. Janet was enjoying herself too much, however, to remark upon this, and if she noticed it at all she attributed it to the quieting effect of the drive through the early twilight.

They were more than half-way home when one of the leaders shied violently at a bicycle which had been left lying by the side of the road while its owner rested near. The four horses sprang forward with one accord and broke into a run. With a clash and a clatter the swaying coach with its frightened occupants dashed up the Wissahickon road.

CHAPTER XV

FOR a short time, which seemed hours to them all, it looked as though destruction were inevitable. Not one person among them but realized that this was a moment of awful uncertainty, for the road was narrow here, and if they chanced to meet another vehicle it would be impossible to avoid a collision, the horses having become quite unmanageable.

Cynthia Gordon, on the box-seat, looked beyond the galloping horses, straining her eyes towards a bend in the road around which at any moment a carriage might come. Neal, behind her, leaned over and put his hand on her shoulder, but no one said a word. Loraine and Janet grasped each other by the hand and held on as best they could, while the coach swayed and tossed like a ship on an angry sea when they rounded the bend in the road.

Then Mr. Saunders, who was an expert whip, controlled his horses with a mighty effort and brought them down first to a rapid trot, then to a walk, and finally to a stand-still. The grooms jumped down and ran to their heads, and the danger was over.

During those minutes of terror a great deal had passed through Loraine's mind. The subject upon which she had been pondering so deeply during the drive stood forth with convincing clearness. It came

over her with absolute certainty that she had been weak to believe Ethel's story for an instant, and to allow herself to be cajoled by Ethel's flattery. She knew that Janet was the one to be trusted, and if they lived through this terrible experience she would never doubt her again.

She glanced at Alan, who had treated her with more marked coldness than before after having seen her with her arm in Ethel's. He had good reason, she said to herself. He was leaning forward now, watching the horses and the road. His face looked so strong and earnest; there was no sign of fright there. Alan must be as brave as a lion, she thought. She wished that she could count him for a friend. Surely they would all be killed, and Loraine grew whiter, but she found a strange source of self-control in watching Alan's face.

And then presently it was all over, and after a brief period of awed silence the party fell to talking, comparing their thoughts and emotions, their fears and their despair, while the quivering horses stood still in the road and the grooms petted and caressed them, soothing them to their former quiet, and soon they were moving towards home once more through the rapidly gathering darkness.

Loraine often thought afterwards of those few moments of terror, and she was always inclined to believe that they exerted a lasting influence over her after-life. She may have exaggerated the effect of them, but it is certain that from that time she became impervious to the flattery of Ethel Foster, she gained implicit faith in Janet, and she made more effort to

win Alan Ransford's friendship. She feared, however, that his disapproval and dislike would never be overcome.

The following week passed all too quickly for Mr. Thaddeus West and his nephews. The days seemed fairly to fly, bringing nearer with alarming rapidity the one which was to witness the home-coming of Mr. and Mrs. Simon West.

After a few hours of gloomy foreboding Mr. Thaddeus had risen to the occasion, cast his fears and his disapproval behind him, and prepared to make the best of a bad situation. He vacated the rooms which had been his for thirty years and moved to the third story, that he might leave the whole second floor to his brother.

"On the whole, I like it up here," said he. "It is cheery and bright and nice to be up among you boys. I don't know why I never did it before."

He went to Philadelphia and bought a new carpet for the bride, as well as a very handsome clock by way of a wedding present.

"I only hope your uncle Simon won't think he must take it for his collection," he said, as he placed it upon the mantel-shelf of his former room and wound and set it, listening with pleased attention to its musical chime. "After all, boys, it will be very nice to have a lady in the house. Now, you know it will, and I shall be saved the bother of pouring out the tea and coffee. I dare say we shall all grow very fond of your aunt Evelina."

But the boys groaned audibly at this and failed to agree with him, Charles and Tom even going so

far as to make faces at each other behind their uncle's back, which he plainly saw in the mirror but did not comment upon.

On the day upon which the happy pair were expected to arrive their brother Thaddeus ordered a quantity of lovely roses, and when the carriage drew up at the front of the house he hurried down the path to meet its occupants, with a beaming smile and pleasant words of welcome.

The boys had promptly disappeared, grasping eagerly a few more moments of freedom. Mr. Simon West's ponderous form emerged from the carriage. He extended a limp, fat hand to his brother and then turned with perfunctory courtesy to assist his wife. Then, seeing that Thaddeus was apparently eager to do the same, he left them and walked up the path.

"My collections, Thaddeus! I hope they are intact," said he. "You never wrote me a word about them, which seemed to me most thoughtless."

Mr. Thaddeus, however, was, for the first time in his life, not listening when his brother spoke.

"My dear madam—sister, I may be permitted to call you, I am sure," he remarked, as with extreme gallantry he offered Mrs. West his arm, "allow me to welcome you to our heretofore bachelor abode, now to be graced by a woman's presence. It is high time, I assure you, that we had some one to keep us all in order; and Simon—sly dog that he is!—Simon knew it and went about it with his usual cleverness. He is very clever, Simon is. I dare say you know that already."

"I'm sure you are very kind to say so," simpered Mrs. West, though whether she was referring to her husband's cleverness or the welcome to herself it was impossible to guess; "but people always are saying kind things, and that makes me think of what my late husband, Mr. Grafton, used to say—"

"Evelina," interrupted Mr. Simon West, turning and surveying them from the top step of the little porch as the two walked up the path—"Evelina, I have mentioned to you more than once before—and I trust that this may be the last time—that I do *not* care to hear you allude to the speeches of your late husband. Positively, Thaddeus, I am sick of that man's name!" he added, peevishly.

"Oh, I quite forgot, Mr. West! Indeed I did, and it was stupid of me, too, when you have spoken of it so often," rejoined his wife with unruffled serenity; and then the three went into the house.

Simon repaired at once to his museum, where he promptly unlocked one of the glass-cases and laid among the treasures a certain amethyst and silver ring. "There," said he to himself, as he stepped back and looked at the effect, "that is quite an addition! I could scarcely wait to get home to put it there. It has been pretty costly, but I don't regret it. Upon my word, I don't regret it *yet*!" And after a hasty glance about the museum to see that all was as it should be, he locked the case and then the door of the room, and rejoined his wife and brother.

Mrs. West was lost in admiration of the carpet and the clock, but Simon thought the old carpet would have been good enough, and was quite put out with

his brother because he had bought a clock which was exactly like one in his own collection.

"I really call it extremely thoughtless on your part, Thaddeus," he said; "I really do. As long as you were buying a clock why couldn't you have chosen a different one, that would have added to my variety? There would have been some point to that." But Thaddeus, although he did not agree with his brother—possibly for that very reason—did not reply.

Mrs. West was installed behind the cups and saucers that night at supper, and Thaddeus, who took the place at her right hand, declared that the table was now complete, though she made sad havoc of the tea-pouring, deliberately heaping three lumps into his cup when he distinctly told her that he did not take sugar, and pouring half the contents of the cream-jug into Sidney's, who never under any circumstances liked cream. But as Simon's cup happened to be properly constructed, no criticism was made, and the sufferers swallowed their potions in silence.

In the evening Mr. and Mrs. Lee came in to call upon the new arrivals, and thus the home-coming passed off better than had been expected; and Mr. Thaddeus, sitting alone in his library until long after midnight, ventured to hope that all would go well.

"And it may do Simon good, after all," said he to himself, as he rose to get another book, "though he seems inclined to scold a little; but that is just Simon, and he doesn't mean anything by it. It is only his way, and I hope she understands that."

September had now drawn to a close, and on the

first of October the schools would begin. Loraine was now to go to a school in Germantown, at which Janet Franklin had also been entered. As Ethel Foster went to one in Philadelphia, this separated the girls more completely than anything else would have done, and they saw but little of one another. Then, too, they were all so much occupied with their studies and with their various engagements out of school, such as their music, their dancing, and their cooking classes, and their out-door amusements, that they were thrown very little together.

Naturally enough, Ethel resented the coldness with which she was now treated by her former friends, but she pretended to be perfectly indifferent to them on those rare occasions when they met. It had been a brief intimacy, but, though a disastrous one in some respects, it had taught Loraine a lesson which she never forgot.

Alan and Sidney went to Philadelphia every day. They were preparing for college at the Maberly school, and expected to enter next year. The home life was not as pleasant now for the boys as it had once been. They grew very weary of the ceaseless chatter of their new aunt, and both they and their uncle Thaddeus fell into the habit of spending an evening with the Lees more often than they did before. Even Alan had so far overcome his shyness as to drop in sometimes to see Mrs. Lee. He said little to Loraine on these occasions, but he acknowledged to himself that he liked her better than he once did.

One Friday evening, when there were no lessons to be studied for the next day—the one evening of the

week upon which boys and girls possess the sense of freedom and the spirit of fun-making which they fancy will always be theirs when school is forever a thing of the past—Lorraine gave a little tea-party. The family usually dined late, but on this particular evening the elders were going out to dinner and Lorraine had been permitted to do what she liked at home.

She invited Janet and Sidney to supper, and promptly at seven o'clock the three seated themselves at the table and prepared to enjoy the oysters and waffles and other good things which Mrs. Lee had provided for them.

"Have you heard about the new French professor at our school?" asked Sidney, towards the end of the meal; "he is the greatest joke you ever saw."

"What is he like?" asked Janet, with interest.

"Oh, he is a little bit of a fellow, with horrible curly hair and a great, high collar—a celluloid one, of course—and no cuffs, and trousers that are too short for him. He's a regular sight, and he uses a lot of perfumery. Ugh!"

"He must be a horror!" laughed Lorraine; "anything but perfumery. How long has he been there?"

"Oh, only a week or two, but I thought I must have told you about him before. He is awfully polite and obsequious to 'old Mabe,' but we boys don't like him. He is always telling us to shut up."

"Shut up yourself, you bad boy!" came from the parrot's cage.

"Oh no, I won't, Miss Evelina!" said Sidney, turning around in his chair to laugh at the bird which

hung behind him, "and the French gentleman doesn't say it that way, either. It is '*Taisez-vous! taisez-vous!*' all the livelong time to us fellows; but to Mr. Maberly and the other professors it is '*Oui, monsieur,*' '*Non, monsieur,*' as sweet as sugar-candy."

They had risen from the table by this time, and as they went into the library Sidney imitated the Frenchman's manner and mincing step so absurdly that the girls shouted with laughter.

Janet seated herself at the piano, and after a little while began to play some well-known college airs, while Sidney and Loraine at the other end of the room appeared to be having an exceedingly jolly time. Loraine, with a pencil and paper, was writing something which afforded Sidney unbounded amusement.

Presently Sidney went to the desk, and, taking a fresh sheet of paper, copied off what Loraine had written. Then he read it all aloud, and they burst into fresh peals of laughter.

"What are you two shouting so about?" asked Janet, finishing her playing with a crashing chord and twirling around on the piano-stool to face them. "It must be something awfully funny from the way you are laughing."

"It is," replied Sidney. "It is just about the killingest thing you ever read. Loraine has made up some verses about old Boulanger. Listen to this!"

He came forward, and, standing under the tall lamp near the piano, he read aloud these verses:

"'Twas at a very well-known school of Philadelphia
A superfine professor did arrive one autumn day;

His nose it was an aquiline, his hair of raven hue,
And all he said was '*Oui, monsieur,*' and '*Taisez, taisez-vous!*'
And all he said was '*Oui, monsieur,*' and '*Taisez, taisez-vous!*'

" When every man among us was a-settling to his task,
And learned 'profs.' were striving learned questions for to
ask,

There dawned upon the vision of that very proper crew,
This dapper little person with his '*Taisez, taisez-vous!*'
His '*Oui, monsieur,*' and '*Non, monsieur,*' and '*Taisez, taisez-*
vous!'

" His celluloidish collar never saw the laundry-tub,
'Tis very stiff and very high, but wouldn't stand a rub;
His trousers are too short for him, his cuffs are not on
view,
But still he murmurs, '*Oui, monsieur,*' and '*Taisez, taisez-*
vous!'

In dulcet tones his '*Oui, monsieur,*' and '*Taisez, taisez-vous!*'

" He scents his pocket-handkerchief, perfumes his curly hair,
E'en if we didn't see him we'd know that he was there;
And he always feeds on garlic or on odorous ragoût;
But still he murmurs, '*Oui, monsieur,*' and '*Taisez, taisez-vous!*'
And still he murmurs, '*Oui, monsieur,*' and '*Taisez, taisez-vous!*'

" So one and all good fellows of the school of Maberlee,
Let's send this foreign gentleman right back across the sea;
Across to Gallia's fried-up frogs and onion-flavored stew,
With his never-ending '*Oui, monsieur,*' and '*Taisez, taisez-*
vous!'

His everlasting '*Oui, monsieur,*' and '*Taisez, taisez-vous!*' "

This production was received with hearty applause
and approval. Janet laughed her loudest and long-
est and then played a college tune which fitted the

words exactly, and they all sang them. In this way the evening passed off merrily; and when Sidney said good-night and went home they could say with truth that they had had a very good time.

Janet had been invited to stay all night, which both girls considered a great treat. They did not wait for Mr. and Mrs. Lee to come home, but as soon as Sidney had taken his departure they mounted to Loraine's room in the third story, for half the fun was to sit for a long time in front of the wood fire talking over the thousand and one things which these two were forever discussing.

Loraine went down to say good-night to her father and mother when they came home, and then returned to sit by the fire until long after the house became quiet, talking in mysterious whispers, that no one might guess that they were still up.

"I wish we had those verses here," said Janet, when they had finally reached the subject of the evening's amusement; "they are capital, Loraine! I do wish I could write such things. Do you know, I can't make a rhyme to save my life. It is with the greatest difficulty that I can remember that 'lamb' rhymes with—with—I'm sure I don't know what!"

"Jam," suggested Loraine. "'With a portion of spring lamb I should like some currant jam, though I think the proper name for it is jell'—hm! let me see what will come next— 'And for a second course, give me goose and apple-sauce, and'—hm!—'some lobster and some terrapin as well!'"

"Oh!" laughed Janet, "I'm afraid you would die

before morning if a fairy were to hear your wish and grant it! But it is wonderful to hear you reel off rhymes like that, Loraine. Do repeat the French professor ones to me."

"I can't remember them, and that reminds me! Do you suppose Sidney carried them off with him?"

"I shouldn't wonder. He was so delighted with them that I've no doubt he took them home and will show them to all the boys at the Maberly school to-morrow."

Janet said this with a mischievous glance at Loraine. Her words had just the effect she desired; Loraine was overcome with dismay at the idea.

"Why, he mustn't!" she exclaimed. "I never dreamed of their being shown to any one else. Why, Janet, it won't do at all! How stupid of me not to have told him that they must be kept a secret! Do you suppose he really will show them?"

"Of course he will," said Janet, who never lost an opportunity of teasing; "probably they will go the rounds of the school to-morrow. Loraine, you are the funniest girl I ever met! Why do you care? If I had written those verses I should be glad enough to have people see them. They are only for fun."

"Oh, but suppose the French professor himself were to see them! Why, Janet, it would be too dreadful! His feelings would be awfully hurt, and I wouldn't hurt them for the world! He may be really a very nice man, and those heartless boys are just making fun of him. Probably he is awfully poor, and

that is the reason he wears celluloid collars and no cuffs."

"That wouldn't account for the perfumery," said Janet, wickedly.

Loraine said nothing for a moment. Presently she rose from the hearth-rug, where she had been sitting at Janet's feet, and lighted a candle.

"I suppose the gas is out," she said, "for it is nearly twelve o'clock, so I will take a candle. I am going down to the library to see if those verses are there. If they are not, I shall know that Sidney took them, and I must make a point of seeing him tomorrow morning and telling him that they mustn't be taken to town, and that nobody must be told about them."

"What a goose you are, Loraine! I wouldn't go a way down-stairs in the dark just for that. Why don't you wait till the morning?"

"Because I sha'n't sleep a wink until I know for certain," replied Loraine, who indeed looked very wide-awake at that moment as she stood in the doorway in her pink wrapper, with the lighted candle in her hand. "You needn't come if you don't want to."

"Indeed I haven't the slightest intention of coming!" laughed Janet. "You are the greatest goose I know. I intend to be sound asleep by the time you come back."

Loraine went noiselessly down the two flights of stairs to the library. She found her own roughly written copy of the verses, but not a sign of the paper upon which Sidney had copied them was to be seen,

although she searched carefully in the desk and on the tables and the piano, even looking among the music which lay there.

There was no doubt that Sidney had taken it, and she must be up betimes to-morrow to see him before he went to the city. Although it was Saturday, he had told her that he was going to the school for some special purpose, and Loraine felt quite sure that he would take that opportunity of showing the rhymes to the chosen spirits whom he should meet there.

She was on her way up-stairs again when she happened to pause at the hall-window on the second floor. It was bright moonlight without, and she could see the road as plainly as at noonday.

While she stood there looking out a figure glided past the house on a bicycle. She was sure that it was Alan Ransford ; but where could he be going at that hour ?

CHAPTER XVI

WHEN Loraine and Janet came to the breakfast-table the next morning they learned that Mr. Thaddeus West was very ill. One of the boys had been in to tell Mr. Lee, who had gone back with him to see if there was anything that could be done to help, and to find out exactly how ill his uncle was.

Mr. Lee returned presently, and his grave face showed that matters were serious.

"He is alarmingly ill," said he. "It seems that he was suddenly attacked with pain last evening, and at twelve Alan went for the doctor, who has been there all night. Dear, dear; it will be a sad business if Thaddeus is taken!"

"Oh, father, you don't really think it is possible, do you?" asked Loraine. Until now death had never come very near to her, and in consequence she regarded it as one of those distant possibilities which would be very awful were it to visit one whom she knew well and loved, but which was really not in the least probable. "Surely Uncle Thaddeus isn't going to die?" she added.

"I don't know. Such an attack is very alarming when it comes to a man of his age, and the doctor does not give much hope, though he says Thaddeus has an iron constitution and has always led such an

even, healthful sort of life that there is more chance of his recovery. I am sure I hope so. I don't know what would become of those boys if he were to die."

Sadly the friends discussed the matter, and as soon as breakfast was over Mrs. Lee went next door to give their neighbors what comfort she could. She found the boys wandering about the lower part of the house with anxious and disconsolate faces, not knowing what to do and fearing they knew not what. Their uncle Simon had shut himself into his museum, while his wife remained in her own apartments, weeping for a few minutes and then drying her eyes to run to the foot of the stairs and peer, first upward to see if the doctor were coming, and then across at the closed door of the museum.

"Oh, Helen," she exclaimed, in an agitated whisper, when she saw Mrs. Lee, "I am thankful to see you! Come right into my room. See the carpet he got for me, and the clock! And it is the strangest thing, he was saying only yesterday that it went too fast and he would regulate it; though when it comes to regulating you never know where to stop, and it always seems to me better to have it done by a regular clock-man—though, after all, those men the jewelers send are not always dependable; but it does seem the strangest thing that poor, dear brother Thaddeus—he asked me to call him that; in fact, he said drop the 'brother' altogether; and as I never had a brother, that is, one that I can remember, though there was one who died in his infancy, but whom I never saw—"

"Cousin Evelina," said Mrs. Lee, gently interrupt-

ing her, "do tell me if there is anything at all that I can do for you?"

"Nothing, Helen, nothing!" replied Mrs. West, her tears again beginning to flow. "Such a good, kind man! There never was one like him—that is, I never met any like him except a gentleman, a cousin of my late husband, Mr. Gr—"

"I know, dear Cousin Evelina. Mr. Thaddeus West is certainly one of the best men that ever lived. And now, if you will excuse me, I will go down and sit with the boys for a few minutes. They seem so sad and lonely."

"Oh, the boys! yes, I know. Yes, I would gladly have them with me up here, Helen, and I wish you would tell them so, for Mr. West is over in his museum and I dare say he wouldn't mind having them come up here if they will be careful not to have muddy shoes, though after all this dry weather I don't see why there should be much mud"—but Mrs. Lee had gone.

She went to the library, and, with Jimmy on her lap and the others gathered about her, she talked to them of their uncle. Then, in a little while, she sent the younger ones out-of-doors to amuse themselves, promising to call them at once should there be any need of it, while Alan and Sidney stayed with her for a long and serious talk.

Sidney went softly up-stairs after a time to see if there was any change, and Alan walked to the window and stood looking out upon his uncle's flower-beds, not blooming now, for it was winter. The light shone on his strong young face, and Mrs. Lee's moth-

erly heart went out to the boy when she saw how worn and anxious he looked.

"Alan, my poor boy!" she said, going to him and putting her hand through his arm; "don't look so hopeless. Uncle Thaddeus is still with us and he may be for years to come. You know the doctor says there is some chance of his recovery."

"I know that, Mrs. Lee," said Alan, "but I don't dare hope. Somehow I seem to know that Uncle Thad is going to die, and I can't give him up! My father went, and then Uncle Thad took his place, and now in such a little time he is going, too, and there will be no one left. Uncle Simon doesn't like me. He doesn't like any of us, really, and what are we boys going to do? Oh, Uncle Thad! Uncle Thad!" And Alan, turning away, leaned his head against the window-frame and cried.

It was only for an instant, however. Very soon he was himself again, and when Sidney returned he was able to face him calmly and listen to his report.

"He is better," announced Sidney, in a joyous voice. "The doctor says the attack is passing over, and he really thinks there are more encouraging symptoms. Oh, Mrs. Lee, I don't believe Uncle Thad is going to die, after all!"

It was many a day, however, before the patient was declared to be actually out of danger, and, until he was, the two families who were such near neighbors and who had become such close friends could think of little else.

Naturally enough, Loraine's verses about the French professor were quite forgotten, and it did not occur

to her to ask Sidney to give them back to her, or to refrain from showing them to any one else. From the moment that she had heard of Mr. West's illness they had gone completely out of her mind.

One day—it was several weeks later, and January snow was on the ground—Lorraine and Janet went to town together. Janet had tickets for a concert, and as Cynthia was unable to go she had invited Lorraine to take her place. The concert was to begin at three o'clock, and the girls had been excused from school before the session was over that they might take an early afternoon train for Philadelphia.

It was a raw, cloudy day, and shortly after twelve o'clock it began to snow. The prospects were that the storm would be a heavy one, and had the girls first gone home from school they would probably have not been allowed to go to town in the face of such weather; but they gave no one the opportunity to prevent the expedition, for they took the train from a station that was near the school.

“It looks as if it were going to be a bad storm,” observed Lorraine, glancing doubtfully at the clouds, from which the flakes were falling now so thick and fast. “Do you think we ought to go?”

“Oh, of course!” returned Janet. “It would be a perfect shame to miss the concert, and we have such good seats, and all. I am sure I don't mind a snow-storm, do you? I think they are fun. Why, this would be a mere sun-shower in Massachusetts.”

“I think they are fun, too,” said Lorraine, “and, of course, I don't mind going out in them. I was

only thinking of our coming home, which will be rather late anyhow, and we might be detained."

"Oh, nonsense! We couldn't possibly be. I think it's a great deal more fun than if it had been a clear day."

In the station in town they met Alan. He was stalking along with a gloomy face and a preoccupied air. He stared at them a moment as if he did not know them, then, suddenly discovering who they were, he raised his cap and passed on, only to stop again, think for a moment, and then, turning, run after the girls.

"Loraine," said he, overtaking them, "I want to ask you something. Stop a minute. Have you seen Sidney?"

"To-day? No."

"Nor yesterday?"

"No," said Loraine, considering, "I don't think I did."

"Then you haven't heard anything?"

"Heard anything? No. What do you mean?"

Alan looked about for a moment. They were standing at the top of the broad stairs which led to the street, and crowds of travellers were hurrying past on their way to or from the many trains in the great station.

"What do you mean?" repeated Loraine, when she found that Alan did not continue. "Is anything the matter?"

"Yes, a good deal is the matter," replied Alan. "I don't know whether it is worth while to tell you, and yet I can't help thinking that you could help us. There has been a regular row at school."

The girls drew nearer, looking at him with eager interest.

"And is Sidney in it?" asked Janet.

"I should say so! He's the one it is all about. I'm afraid he is going to be suspended, and if he is it will just about kill Uncle Thad, he would be so awfully mortified. It is all about the French professor."

"Alan! What about him?" exclaimed Loraine.

"It seems Sidney wrote some verses about him, at least they are in Sid's handwriting. He showed them to all of us, but he wouldn't tell who really wrote them. I'm pretty sure he didn't himself, for he never wrote such verses in his life; but they are in his writing, and they got mislaid the other day, fell out of a book or something right at old Boulanger's feet, and, as luck would have it, he picked them up and read them. He was in a tearing rage, of course, and showed them to Mr. Maberly, and there's been a great time. Sidney won't tell anything about them, and, of course, the writing being his, nails it down on him pretty securely."

During this recital Loraine had grown very pale. She stood with her eyes fixed upon Alan's face until he had finished.

"Alan," she said, "I wrote those verses."

"I thought you did," returned Alan, quietly.

"That is the reason I told you."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I don't exactly know what. Sid wouldn't like my asking your help. He thinks it beneath his dignity to offer any explanation, and he won't apologize."

I'm pretty sure he is going to be dropped, not only for having written them, as old Mabe supposes he did, but for his high-and-mighty attitude since. If Uncle Thad were well it wouldn't make so much difference, but, as it is, I'm awfully afraid it may do him harm."

"What made you think I wrote them?" asked Loraine, curiously.

"Because I've always been told you wrote clever verses, and something Sidney said about not dragging a girl into the scrape made me think so. For my part, I don't see why girls should be allowed to escape any more than fellows."

"That is a real Alan Ransford speech," remarked Janet.

Alan colored and turned away.

"Perhaps it is," he said, "but I am sorry you took old Boulanger for your butt. He is a harmless enough little fellow and awfully poor, but as proud as Lucifer. He says he will leave unless Sidney is dropped, and I don't know what will become of him if he does. Well, good-bye! I thought I would tell you about it, anyway. It is time for my train."

And before they could speak he was gone.

"Oh, Janet," said Loraine, "what am I to do?"

"I don't know, I am sure. I can't imagine what Alan thought you ought to do. But we must hurry now, Loraine, for it is late, and we want to get there before the concert begins."

Loraine felt that all pleasure in the concert was over for her, but she followed Janet down the steps and out on to Market Street. They had still some little distance to go, and as they trudged along over

the snowy sidewalks they discussed the situation, coming, however, no nearer to a solution of the difficulty.

Arrived at the Academy of Music, they took their seats; and while Janet amused herself by watching the people, Loraine sat with her eyes upon her programme, but her mind was busy with other subjects. The musicians took their places, the stir of the arriving audience ceased, the conductor rapped smartly upon his desk with his bâton, and the music began, but Loraine paid no heed.

Over and over again the same thoughts passed through her mind with endless reiteration. She had written those verses; it had been her idea entirely to do it, for Sidney would never have thought of it. She had been careless to let him keep them. Alan had told her the story, evidently hoping that she would take some action in the matter. That was very apparent, for otherwise he would never have troubled himself to stop the girls in the station and give them the long and detailed account. Now the question was, what should she do?

Should she write Mr. Maberly a note? That would scarcely answer. He did not know her, and he might not believe her note. Besides, how could she explain it all in writing? She must think of some other plan.

The only other plan that offered was to go to the school herself and see Mr. Maberly in person. She would do that to-morrow if her father and mother approved, and perhaps they would be able to suggest some better way. But, in the meantime, matters were approaching a crisis at the school, and she was

afraid that word of it might come to the ears of Uncle Thaddeus. She agreed with Alan that it would do him great harm. He had reached that stage of convalescence when the most trifling affairs assumed great importance in his eyes, and this one was surely no trifle.

It would never do to have him hear it. No, if anything was to be done it must be done at once. There was no time to lose.

Just as Loraine reached this conclusion, with a sounding crash the music ceased. After the applause died away some of the members of the orchestra left the stage, while the audience began to move about.

"Is it over?" asked Loraine, gathering up her muff and jacket and making ready to go.

"Why, no!" returned Janet, with some scorn. "This is only the intermission. Haven't you been listening, Loraine, or following the programme at all? It has been perfectly grand."

"I know," said Loraine, absently, putting down her possessions again; "very fine, but just at the last I wasn't listening so closely, and I thought perhaps it was over. Do you know, I really think I ought to go there, Janet?"

"Go where?" asked Janet, in some surprise. "What are you talking about, Loraine?"

"To the Maberly school."

"But what for?"

"Why, to explain about the verses, of course."

"Oh, dear me, Loraine! What's the use of bothering? Let Sidney get himself out of his own scrapes. You are just being egged on to this by what Alan

said. I wouldn't pay him so much attention if I were you."

"It isn't that at all; but I've been thinking it over, and I really think it would be dreadful to let Sidney be suspended and Uncle Thaddeus have all that worry if I can help it; so I am going there this afternoon."

"Not to see Mr. Maberly?"

"Yes, to see Mr. Maberly."

"But, my dear child, do you remember what kind of a man he is? There isn't a boy there who isn't afraid of him, though they won't acknowledge it. Why, he is a perfect terror! They say the very bravest of them is frightened to pieces if he looks at them in a certain way when there is any sort of a scrape in the air."

"I know all that," replied Loraine, firmly. "Haven't I heard all about 'old Mabe' for years, and particularly since we went to Germantown to live and have known Sidney so well? But, for all that, I am going, and I am going this afternoon. You needn't come if you don't want to. I can go alone."

"Oh, I wouldn't miss it for the world! If you are going to beard the lion in his den I must be there to see the show. I think you are a great goose, though. I don't believe it will do a bit of good, and Sidney will be dropped just the same, and you will have had all the trouble for nothing and will get none of the credit."

"I don't want the credit," said Loraine; "but I do want to feel that I've done what I could, and I sha'n't be satisfied until I go and try. Do you think

we had better stay until the end of the concert, Janet?"

"Oh yes. It will be over by half-past four, certainly, and that will give us plenty of time. The school isn't very far from here, and, besides, we don't want to miss any of the music."

The members of the orchestra were returning to their places now, and although Loraine felt that it was a mistake to remain on such a stormy afternoon, she scarcely liked to insist that Janet should go now; for as she had provided the tickets and they had come to town solely for the purpose of attending the concert, it did not seem right to hurry her away against her will; so Loraine resigned herself to her fate and waited.

But when her watch told her that it was half-past four and she found that there were still three selections to be performed, she said to herself that it would not do for her to delay longer. If her purpose was to be carried out that day she must go at once.

She whispered to Janet, telling her that she need not accompany her unless she wished, that they could meet afterwards at the station, but that she, Loraine, must leave as soon as possible. Janet, however, was now quite ready to go, and when the expected pause between the selections came the two girls rose and hurried up the aisle and out to the entrance of the Academy.

They found that it was already dark, but the electric street-lights showed that the storm had not abated. It was still snowing fast, and although on many sidewalks the shovellers were hard at work, rejoicing in the fresh fall of snow, which gave them

more to do, in other places it was quite deep, and walking was necessarily slow.

A large number of carriages were drawn up in front of the Academy, pedestrians with heads bent against the storm moved carefully over the slippery pavements, and down Broad Street as far as the eye could reach the double row of electric lights gleamed dimly through the hazy atmosphere.

The voices of the passers-by and of the men who shouted to their horses, endeavoring to keep them on their feet, blending with the noise of the scraping shovels, had that strange, resonant sound which is given by falling snow. It all seemed odd and unusual to Janet and Loraine, while the mere idea of being out alone after dark in the city was exciting enough. Added to this, the fact that they were about to call upon the much-talked-of and greatly-to-be-dreaded Professor Maberly filled their hearts with thrills of mingled fear and anticipation. It certainly was an unusual thing to do, and the haste with which their course had been decided upon prevented their courage from deserting them.

After a slow but not very long walk they found themselves in front of the well-known boys' school, which they had long been accustomed to regard with interest but had never been so near before. On the door, gleaming clear and distinct in the rays of the street-light, was a huge steel door-plate, upon which were engraved the words "Maberly School."

There was no mistaking the house. They were there!

With trembling fingers Loraine pulled the bell-handle.

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN Alan left the two girls in the station and ran to his train, he said to himself that he had been rather foolish to waste his time in talking to them. He barely caught the train, as it was, and had he delayed another minute he would have been obliged to wait three-quarters of an hour for the next.

"It's a lucky thing I didn't miss it," he thought ; "I should have been mad enough. It isn't going to do a bit of good to have told Loraine. A fellow, now, would go straight to old Maberly and own up, but catch a girl doing that ! Well, if Sidney is dropped it will simply kill Uncle Thad ; I'm sure of that."

The boy sat looking out upon the snow-covered fields as the train moved past them. They were going slowly, for the storm made rapid travelling impossible, the atmosphere being thick with the falling snow. His face wore an anxious, saddened expression, for he fully realized what it would be to lose Uncle Thaddeus. The other boys had not had the same experience of sorrow that had been Alan's share. Even Sidney had been young when his father died, and his nature, too, was different.

The tie between Alan and his father had been very strong ; and when in his loneliness, after his father's death, Uncle Thaddeus had come to him, the boy had

transferred to this kindly uncle all the affection of which his deep, strong nature was capable. He had no near relatives on the Ransford side, and his mother's family had grown very dear to him. He wondered what would become of him without Uncle Thad.

"I wish I could do more to please him," said Alan to himself. "He wants me to be polite and thoughtful. He says it is selfish to be anything else. I don't want to be selfish, I'm sure, but it is awfully hard for me to do all those little things that Uncle Thad is forever doing for people. It seems as if it were putting myself forward and making myself conspicuous, and I hate that; but I wish I were more like him!"

Although their uncle appeared to be wonderfully improved in health, Alan dared not believe that he would ever be really well again. When he reached home he went directly, as was his custom, to his uncle's room. He found him in his big chair by the window. A book was in his hand, but he was not reading. He sat looking out on the storm while Mrs. West, in a briskly moving rocking-chair which creaked at every motion, sat near endeavoring to entertain him. He turned a weary face to his nephew and welcomed him with a kindly smile.

"Well, Alan, my boy, I'm glad to see you! And now, sister Evelina, I won't detain you another minute. Alan has come and he will look after me. I want to hear all about the doings at school to-day."

"My dear brother Thaddeus, I am not in the least hurry to go," replied Mrs. West. "You needn't think for a moment that I'm not glad to sit here and

talk—not that I'm over-fond of talking, but a little chat like this is no effort, though why I shouldn't be glad to make an effort, if one were necessary, for any one who is so good and kind—"

"My dear sister, I beg that you won't stay another minute. I think, in fact I am quite sure, that Simon may want to speak to you."

"Oh, in that case," cried Simon's wife, rising with alacrity and dropping her knitting and her spectacles—"in that case I must go. Thank you, Alan; thank you!" For Alan had stooped to pick up the articles for her; and then she flitted from the room.

"I had to do it, Alan!" replied Mr. Thaddeus; "I really had, in a measure, to hint to her to go. As good and kind a soul as ever lived, but oh, that tongue of hers! She has been chattering for fully forty minutes. I am glad, my boy, that you came, and I'm glad to see, too, that you are growing so thoughtful for others and that you don't forget the little courtesies. If we men could always remember that one of our greatest privileges is to be of some service to a woman, the world would be a better place. I know it is an old-fashioned idea, but some of the old-fashioned ideas are good ones, and I want my boys to be *gentle men* in every sense of the word. And now tell me about the day at school, and how our formidable friend, Dr. Maberly, was to-day."

Presently Sidney came in, followed by the other boys, and for a long time they sat there, contented to be with the favorite uncle, who took so sincere and kindly an interest in their sports and their studies, no trifle being too small for his attention.

He had a way of interspersing the conversation with little hints of good advice, expressed in such a way that it made a lasting impression upon the boys without seeming to have been preached to them. Not one of the five nephews gathered there ever forgot in after-life that snowy afternoon in Uncle Thad's room, and many times afterwards did Alan and Sidney say to each other that they were glad they had let no hint escape them of the trouble at school.

It was towards the close of the day that the doctor came to see him. Something must have gone wrong that was visible only to the professional eye, for the physician looked grave and wrote a prescription which he wished to have made up at a certain drug-store in the city. One of the boys must go to Philadelphia to get it. Alan was the first one to hear of this, and he immediately made ready to go, his heart filled with anxiety when he saw the doctor's face.

"Is there any danger?" he asked. They were standing together in the hall down-stairs.

"Not immediate," was the response, and that was all that he could learn.

At the gate Alan encountered Mr. Lee, and told him of his errand. It did not reassure him to see that Mr. Lee also looked anxious. He had just been talking with the doctor, whom he had met in the road.

Alan stopped but a moment, and was hurrying on when Mr. Lee called after him. "I wish you would look for Loraine and Janet Franklin as you come through the station, Alan. They were not on the last train, and Mrs. Lee is getting quite alarmed. If they are not on the next they will probably be on the one

you take to come back. They went to a concert, and we can't imagine why they are so late. It doesn't seem as if the storm were bad enough to detain them so long."

"I met them in town as I was coming out," Alan called back to him from the corner, "and perhaps I shall again."

Train after train came out, however, and did not bring either one of the three. Mr. Lee went to the station and remained there finally, hoping that each one of the frequent trains would bring them. Neal Gordon came, but he had seen nothing of them. He went home, but finding that Cynthia had grown very anxious, he came back to the station to discuss with Mr. Lee the best course of action. Even if he were to go to town, it would be difficult to know what to do to find the girls. He would in that case run the risk of passing them on the road, and it seemed better to wait at least until Alan should return.

What could have detained them the two men could not imagine, for the storm had not been of long enough duration to block travel, and the trains were running regularly, with only a slight detention. It seemed as if something else must have happened, and they looked first at their watches and then at one another as they walked up and down the platform of the little station, or went into the waiting-room to warm themselves and to study the time-table.

"If they are not on the next train I will go to town," said Mr. Gordon, at last. "I don't think I can stay here doing nothing any longer. Janet is a heedless sort of girl. She ought not to go to town

alone, I think, though Mrs. Gordon laughs at my ideas. Loraine has a little more common-sense, but when the two are together there is no knowing what they will do next, and they seem to lose all sense of time. Very likely they had some crazy scheme in their heads which they are carrying out without any regard to us at home, nor to what we may be thinking. At least they might have had the grace to telegraph."

But inquiry at the telegraph office brought only the information that no message had come.

The head master of the Maberly school, in fact the widely renowned and much-dreaded Dr. Maberly himself, had been at work in his study this stormy January afternoon when Isaac, the colored man who had lived with him for many years, knocked upon his door.

"Come!" said the gruff voice of the professor, who did not, however, raise his eyes from his desk, where he was busily writing. It was an article which he had been asked to contribute to the *Educational Review*, and it was imperative that he should lose no time.

Isaac stepped noiselessly up to the desk and coughed apologetically. Seeing that his master paid no attention to his presence, he ventured to speak.

"Please, sah!"

No answer.

"Please, doctah, dere's two young ladies, sah, wants to speak to you."

This bit of information had the desired effect. Dr. Maberly looked up.

"Two young ladies, Isaac?"

"Yes, sah."

"It can't be. It is some one else they want. They have come to the wrong house." And he resumed his writing. Apparently there was nothing more to be said. Isaac, however, thought otherwise.

"Please, sah, it ain't de wrong house. It's you dey want, and nobody else. Dey said 'Doctah Maberly' as plain as de trumpet of an angel."

"But I don't know any young ladies, Isaac," said Dr. Maberly, with a distressed air; "I tell you, it is a mistake. What could young ladies want with me?"

"I dunno, doctah. I ain't asked 'em no questions nor what dey wanted, but dey asked for you, an' o' co'se I let 'em come in, an' dey's waitin' in de 'ception-room."

Dr. Maberly sighed, and, laying down his pen, wheeled around in his desk-chair.

"Show them in here, Isaac," said he.

Isaac briskly departed, and in a moment there were steps and the swish of feminine garments in the hall, and in the doorway of Dr. Maberly's study appeared two young girls. One was tall and broad, with crimson cheeks and bright brown eyes that looked as if their owner were forever laughing; the other was shorter and more slender, with a delicate, piquant face upon which the color came and went with every breath, and large eyes which just now wore a somewhat startled look, although they faced the formidable Dr. Maberly with more courage than many a boy would have thought possible.

Dr. Maberly rose as they entered—he was a very large man—and bowed courteously.

“Pray be seated, ladies!” he said, with a majestic wave of the hand. “What can I do for you?”

Loraine looked at Janet, and Janet looked at Loraine, and then Janet broke into an irrepressible laugh.

“It’s awfully funny!” said she. Upon this Loraine appeared so horrified and Dr. Maberly so astonished that she laughed again. Then with a great effort she straightened her face and turned to her friend.

“Loraine, do hurry up and tell him what we have come for,” said she. “Poor Dr. Maberly doesn’t know what to make of this invasion.”

“It is about those verses,” said Loraine, who had tried in vain to think of some better mode of introducing the subject and then blurted out the words as they came—“those verses about the French professor. Sidney didn’t write them.”

Dr. Maberly’s small, sharp eyes grew smaller and sharper, and he drew his shaggy eyebrows together until they met over the bridge of his nose. His head was massive, and his thick hair and beard and eyebrows gave him a leonine appearance which was truly terrifying.

“Ah,” said he, “so Sidney himself says. You are his sister, I suppose?”

“No, indeed! Sidney has no sisters. I am Loraine Lee, and we live next door to the Wests.”

“Ah,” said Dr. Maberly again, and waited for her to continue, but it was a little difficult to do so un-

der the circumstances. Loraine wished that he would ask some questions, but this Dr. Maberly showed no inclination to do, so she blundered on as best she could.

"I thought I had better come and tell you."

"That Sidney West did not write them? Very good of you, I am sure. Sidney should be very grateful for the possession of such a champion. He asked you to come, I suppose?"

"No, of course not! Do you suppose he would do that?" blazed Loraine. She was provoked now, and forgot her timidity. "I found out quite by chance about it, and I came of my own accord. Sidney doesn't even know that I have heard about the row. I wrote those verses and I came to tell you so."

"You! Well, my dear young lady, I think your wit and your pen might both have been more advantageously employed."

"So do I, but that is not the point. I don't want Sidney punished for what I did. It was not his fault at all, and it would be very bad for his uncle, who is ill, if Sidney were dropped; and if you knew Mr. Thaddeus West as well as I do you would be sorry enough to have any harm come to him, for he is the best man that ever lived, except my father."

"He is fortunate to have such an admirer," remarked Dr. Maberly, in coldly ~~aggravating~~ tones, "but this does not explain to me the fact that the verses are in Sidney West's handwriting, and he acknowledges that he brought them to school."

"Well, I know he oughtn't to have done that," said Loraine, "but, you see, he thought the verses

were pretty good, and I suppose he wanted the boys to see them. The trouble was, he told me those funny things about the French teacher, and I couldn't resist making up some rhymes about him. It is an awfully bad habit."

"She makes capital ones, though," interposed Janet. "Don't you think, Dr. Maberly, that they are really very clever? That part where she speaks of the celluloidish collar that wouldn't stand a rub. I nearly died over that!"

"I cannot say that it affected me so fatally," replied Dr. Maberly.

"No, of course not," said Loraine. "No one thinks my rhymes are so funny except my own friends. Well, you see Sidney copied the verses that night and went off with them, without my realizing at all what he was doing. Then I forgot about them, and I never knew until to-day that there was any trouble. I came here as soon as I could to tell you that it is really all my fault, and if there is anything I can do to make up for it I will gladly do it; but please don't suspend Sidney."

"Why should I not?"

"Why, Dr. Maberly, I have just been telling you why not! I don't think you would have a particle of excuse for doing it."

"Do you not?"

"No, indeed, I don't! I think it would be the meanest and the most unjust thing I ever heard of."

Janet sat gazing at her friend in astonishment. Was this the gentle little Loraine who thus addressed the lion in his den? She glanced at the lion himself

to see how he was taking it. Apparently he was pleased, for beneath the shaggy eyebrows she could surely detect a twinkle, although he said nothing.

"Please promise me that you won't suspend Sidney," continued Sidney's champion.

"Why should I promise?" asked his preceptor.

"Because I ask you to," was the reply, given with the air of wishing to convey that such a reason should be a convincing one. "I shall stay here until you do," she added.

At this Dr. Maberly actually laughed, and Janet, glad of an excuse, joined in it with a will, followed by Loraine, who rose to her feet.

"I think you are going to promise," said she, holding out her hand with a pretty little gesture of graciousness, "and I am *ever* so much obliged to you, truly I am! If there is anything I can ever do for you, I wish you would let me do it. I think you are a very nice, kind man."

"Thank you," said her host, dryly, as he shook hands with her, "I am glad you think so."

"And I want to tell you," continued Loraine, "that I didn't realize at all what an unkind thing I was doing—about the French teacher, I mean. It sounded exactly as if I were making fun of him because he was poor and couldn't dress well. I feel awfully about that, for I wouldn't have done it for the world if I had thought twice about it. I have no doubt he is a very nice man, and I *wish* I hadn't! Good-evening, Dr. Maberly."

"Now I want to ask a favor of you," said Janet, who for some minutes had been waiting her opportu-

nity. "Before we go, can't we take a peep into the school-room? I've always been crazy to see the inside of a boys' school, and I don't suppose I shall ever have another chance. You needn't bother about it yourself, but just let us peep in on our way out."

"I shall be happy to show you over the school," said Dr. Maberly, with grave courtesy; and the astonished Isaac was summoned, who, with the manner of an emperor's body-guard, marched before them, lighting gas and throwing open doors until these two adventurous maidens, escorted by the appalling Dr. Maberly himself, had seen every class-room, every desk, and every black-board in the celebrated Maberly school.

When the inspection was over they thanked their host most enthusiastically, and, bidding him a gay good-bye, they disappeared from his vision into the night and the storm.

"What time do you suppose it is?" said Loraine, as they made their way with as much haste as possible over the snowy, slippery pavement.

"I don't know. From the look of things it must be very late—nearly six, I suppose. We were there a good while. Loraine, will you ever get over it? What will the boys say when they hear about our adventures?"

"I don't know. I think Dr. Maberly is a very nice man, and I shall always stand up for him when they talk about him after this. But I am afraid they will be dreadfully worried about us at home, Janet. Don't you think we had better take a car over to the station?"

They waited on the corner for ten or fifteen minutes

for a car to come, and then when it reached them it was so crowded that they could not get in.

"We can't hang on to the platform," said Loraine, looking after it ruefully, as the conductor, indignant at having been stopped for nothing, pulled his bell and the car moved away. "We shall have to walk, after all, and we have wasted all this time waiting. What will they think at home?"

When they at last arrived at the station they found that a train for Germantown had just gone, and there would not be another for forty minutes. Tired and hungry, they were obliged to wait. They did not like to go into the station restaurant alone at this hour, so there was nothing to do but to sit in the waiting-room and long for the time to pass.

Loraine sent a telegram to her father, telling him that they were safe, although she scarcely hoped that it would reach him before they were at home themselves; and they were just turning away from the office when they saw Alan. Apparently he was looking for them, for as soon as he caught sight of them he came towards them.

"What has made you so late?" he asked. "They are awfully worried about you at home. Your father asked me to look you up, Loraine. He thought I would get out on an earlier train and might meet you, but I had to wait so long for this prescription to be made up that I am pretty late myself. I supposed, of course, you would have gone, but thought I had better look for you."

"You can't guess where we've been, nor the adventures we've had," said Janet.

"I don't suppose I can. It is hardly worth while to try," replied Alan, who could think of little but his uncle.

"But you must guess, Alan," said Loraine, "or at least you must listen while I tell you. We have been to call on a friend of yours."

"Who?" asked Alan, remembering the conversation which they had had when they met before in the station, but not for a moment believing it possible that they had taken any steps in regard to it.

"Only Dr. Maberly," remarked Loraine.

They were quite satisfied with the effect of their words. Alan looked from one to the other in absolute astonishment.

"You haven't, really?" said he, in tones of intense incredulity.

"Indeed we have! We paid him a long call, and he has promised me that Sidney shall not be suspended. I like him very much. In fact, I think Dr. Maberly one of the nicest men I ever met."

"Whew!" whistled Alan, opening his eyes to their utmost width.

"And we had a lovely time," said Janet, taking up the tale. "He took us all over the school and showed us everything. He was perfectly charming."

Alan at this sat down upon the nearest bench and gave way to his amusement. The others joined in the laugh, and the three sat there and laughed so heartily that more than one of the weary passengers who were waiting in the station smiled in sympathy with these three happy and apparently very friendly

young people, who were having such a good time together.

"It is the best joke I ever heard," said Alan, when at last he could speak. "But, Loraine," he added, "I want to tell you something. I think you were pretty good to go there, for, of course, you didn't know it was going to turn out so well. For all you knew, old Mabe might have been pretty nasty, and I'm ever so much obliged to you for going; indeed, I am. And it makes me change my opinion about girls. You've got a lot of pluck, after all."

"If this is the result of Loraine's verses she didn't write them in vain," remarked Janet, while Loraine colored with pleasure but said nothing.

A friendly feeling was established, however, and when the train was at last ready and they took their places in the car Alan and Loraine felt that they liked each other better than they ever had before.

He told the girls why he had come to town again, and imparted to them his fears about Uncle Thaddeus. The merry laughter died away now, and very quietly and sadly they talked about the dear uncle who was so near to them all, but particularly so to the nephew, to whom he had taken a father's place.

And at last they came to their journey's end, where Mr. Lee and Mr. Gordon were still waiting for them, having just received the reassuring telegram. But anxious though the families at home had been, the girls escaped with little censure, for the hearts of all this circle of friends were filled now with but one thought, and as Loraine and Janet were safe, previ-

ous anxiety was forgotten in present suspense as to what the coming hours would bring to pass.

The doctor had made a second visit. Mr. Thaddeus West had suddenly grown much worse, and it was known that he could not live through the night.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE years which followed the death of Mr. Thaddeus West brought many changes. At first it was more than the boys could realize that the dear uncle who had given them a home, who had shared their interests and condoned their shortcomings, who had always been ready to listen to their boyish plans and sympathize with their boyish grievances, would never again be with them.

The great house seemed very lonely and empty without his cheery presence, even though the five boys were still there to fill it. For the first few weeks Uncle Simon, softened by the loss of his only brother, with whom his whole long life had been passed, was kinder and more lenient to his nephews. He even made some effort to take Thaddeus's place in the family, and in a moment of friendliness actually invited them all to the museum to look carefully at the curiosities by way of diversion; but it was but a fleeting emotion.

The habits of a lifetime are difficult to change when one has reached the age of Simon West, and his voice, sharpened by constant fault-finding, could not now be modulated, nor could he learn at this late date to love the boys to whom he had always objected.

He was still too completely absorbed in his own

interests to be greatly affected by that which went on around him ; and though he missed Thaddeus's care and thoughtfulness, his chief difficulty now was how to rid himself of the nephews and have the house to himself.

Mrs. West's grief was sincere. She had been less in awe of "Brother Thaddeus" than she was of her portly husband, and inconsequent and tiresome though she was, she was not without her good points, and she had been truly fond of the kindly nature that had welcomed her to his house and had always treated her with such gentle courtesy. She tried to do what she could for the boys ; but, naturally enough, they did not respond to her advances. In old days they had found her amusing ; now she was irritating to the last degree.

The one thought in the minds of all the boys was to get away. This could not be done at once, however. Sidney and Alan must finish the year at the Maberly school and the younger boys at the school which they attended in Germantown, but next fall they should all be sent off. This was Uncle Simon's purpose, to which they were all glad enough to agree. And so the winter which had been so painfully broken wore away, the summer followed, and then Sidney and Alan went to Harvard, and Charles, Tom, and even little Jimmy were sent to boarding-school.

Some of the vacations were passed at the old home, but that did not always work well. The change in the quiet household caused by the home-coming was more than their uncle Simon could endure uncomplainingly. Every one was unhappy and ill at ease,

and finally the older boys declared that whenever it was possible they would pass their vacations elsewhere, with some of their college friends. Mrs. Lee came to the rescue of the others and invited them to her house, and thus matters were adjusted, though it was sad to see the family so scattered. There seemed no help for it, however.

Janet Franklin went back to her home in Massachusetts in the early part of the following summer, greatly to Loraine's dissatisfaction. The two girls had become very close friends, and it was only after promises had been exchanged that many letters should be written and mutual visits paid that they could become at all reconciled to the parting.

Janet's home was within easy reach of Cambridge, and Sidney West went often to see her, for one of his college friends lived in Brighton, and he frequently spent a vacation there, but Alan Ransford seldom accompanied his cousin. Although he by no means neglected his studies—for he had a fine mind and was determined to make a mark in the world—he was also intensely interested in athletics, and very soon became one of the most valuable members of the football team. As he remarked more than once, he had no time to give to girls, although he did not hold them in the same contempt that he once had done.

Loraine, in the meantime, had grown into a pretty maiden of eighteen. School-days, with their joys and their trials were forever things of the past, and until now life had gone smoothly enough for her, with plenty to fill it and make it interesting, while the thought of all the possibilities which the years to

come might hold made the future more absorbing, perhaps, than the present.

During the summer of the boys' junior year at college, Alan and Sidney came home to Germantown. It had troubled Mrs. Lee excessively that they were becoming so completely alienated from their uncle, who was, after all, their nearest and, indeed, their only relative in the world, and she had determined to make some effort to adjust matters.

She actually had the temerity to suggest to Mr. West that the boys should be invited, and when to her own surprise she found that he was willing to agree, she wrote to each of them begging them to accept the invitation, and explaining to them at length her reasons for wishing them to come.

"You must respond to your uncle's advances," she wrote. "He is getting to be an old man and he is your only relative, and you must remember how dear he was to your uncle Thaddeus. For Uncle Thad's sake, I hope you will come. I would gladly ask you to stay with us, but I think it is your duty to visit your uncle, if only for a week."

The boys came for a week, but the visit lengthened into six. Janet Franklin was staying with her sister at the same time, and the summer days passed quickly and gayly, for there was always something pleasant to do and somebody pleasant to do it with.

College life had done much for Alan, and he no longer withdrew into his shell on the slightest provocation. On the contrary, he was trying to be as much like his uncle Thaddeus as it was possible for a nature so different in many ways to be, and, although

always reserved; he had become more genial and met all friendly advances in the spirit in which they were meant.

He and Loraine appeared to be excellent friends, while he liked Janet immensely, and the four had very good times together; and as their pursuits and interests did not interfere in the least with those of their uncle Simon, he no longer objected to their presence in his house. Mr. Simon West being now absorbed in the collection of autographs—which, strangely enough, he had never attempted before—his whole time, as well as that of his wife, was occupied.

He wrote polite notes to all the celebrated personages of whom he could think, while Mrs. West had the privilege of folding, addressing, stamping, and sealing them, after enclosing the card and the stamped envelope of which the recipient was expected to make use. This labor left Mrs. West but little leisure for conversation, which her husband felt to be a distinct advantage.

He did not regret his marriage, however. Apart from the possession of the amethyst ring, it was a source of comfort to him to have some one to look after the details of house-keeping and to guard him from all disturbance, now that Thaddeus was gone. Whether Mrs. West experienced a like satisfaction in her new life he neither knew nor particularly cared.

One day—it was the last of vacation and the boys were to go back to Cambridge the next day—an expedition was planned for the afternoon. The four

friends were to ride their wheels together for the last time, and they intended to go to the Park. They started off together, through Chestnut Hill to the Wissahickon drive and then down the beautiful road by the little river, a gentle decline all the way and an excellent road over which to spin this cool afternoon in late September.

Alan and Janet were in the lead, and had gone quite beyond ear-shot when there was a sudden rattle and clatter in Loraine's wheel, and with an exclamation of dismay she stopped herself and jumped to the ground.

"What is the matter?" asked Sidney, coming to a halt and going back. "Anything happened?"

"I should think so. Look at my chain!"

And, sure enough, a loose nut had worked the mischief. The screw was gone, the ends of the chain had twisted themselves about in some curious and unaccountable manner, and there would be no more riding for Loraine until a repair-shop could be reached and the loss supplied.

"Was there ever anything so provoking?" she said. "This beautiful afternoon and everything apparently so delightful, and then to have this happen! Your last afternoon, too. Oh, Sidney, I am too provoked! Where is there a repair-shop?"

"None nearer than four miles," returned Sidney, with such evident satisfaction in his voice that Loraine looked at him in some surprise. "There is no possibility of our getting there. We may as well give it up."

"But you seem pleased about it, Sidney, and I

can't imagine why. And why can't we get there? I can easily walk four miles."

"Oh no, you can't. You would be tired out. You will just have to rest here."

"Well, this is rather amusing," said Loraine, with some asperity. "Why are you so determined that I am tired and incapable of walking four miles? And what will the others think? You will have to go after them and tell them what has happened."

"Indeed I sha'n't. Who cares what they think? No doubt they are having a perfectly satisfactory time without us, as we are without them. Don't worry about them, Loraine. There's an awfully jolly place here to sit, quite near the road, you see, so that we can shout to them when they come back, *if* they do, and here we can rest."

"You absurd boy," laughed Loraine. "I believe you are extremely lazy yourself this afternoon and you're glad of an excuse not to ride. I could almost believe that you had taken off that nut yourself so as to make it impossible. Sidney, did you?" She stopped on the side of the woody hill up which they were climbing and turned to face her companion, looking at him severely. The sun shone down through the trees and fell upon his yellow head and slight figure, lighting up his open, boyish face.

"No, of course not!" replied Sidney, turning his blue eyes reproachfully upon her. "Do you suppose I would do anything to cause an accident to happen to you, Loraine? Why, you might have been very much hurt if you hadn't jumped off when you did, and do you suppose I could ever forgive

myself if I had been the means of your being hurt?"

"Dear me," thought Loraine, "I wish Sidney wouldn't look like that and talk like that! I wish I hadn't consented to stop here. Why did that chain go to pieces and why don't the others come back? I believe I will go right home," she said, aloud. "I have something that I must do."

"Nonsense!" said Sidney. "You haven't at all, for you know that we've been planning for this afternoon for the last week."

"But I think I ought to take my wheel to be mended, and I really don't think they are very safe down there. Somebody might come quietly along and go off with them."

"Oh yes, they are perfectly safe. We can watch the road from here, and no one could possibly touch those wheels without my seeing them, so you may as well resign yourself to your fate, Loraine. Let us sit down right here, on this log. I have something to say to you which I had fully determined to say some time to-day or this evening, for I must have an answer before I go back to Cambridge. Of course you know what I'm talking about!"

"Oh, about that everlasting sketch that you want me to do for you, I suppose," said Loraine, speaking very fast. "I really will, Sidney, as soon as I have a moment to spare, though why you should want such a miserable daub as it will be I can't imagine. But I will do it for you, indeed I—"

"That isn't it at all," said Sidney, interrupting her, "and you know it isn't," he added, shrewdly.

"You're only talking against time. I want the sketch, but there is something else I want still more, and I must have it, Loraine, indeed I must! It is you, yourself! Please don't turn away, dear. Let me look at you. Tell me that I may love you. Please let me go back to college knowing that you love me, if it is only a little. I don't know what will become of me, Loraine, if you don't say yes."

But Loraine said nothing.

"Don't you think you can care for me a little, Loraine?" he pleaded, and Sidney's voice could be very tender. "I know I'm a poor sort of fellow in lots of ways. I'm not awfully clever, like Alan, and I don't grind the way he does, and I like to have a good time; but, Loraine, if you would promise to marry me some day, I would settle down hard, indeed I would. I would try my very best to get ahead. It would be the best incentive I could have. If you don't, I don't know what will become of me. Why don't you answer, Loraine?" he said, rising and standing in front of her.

"Surely you know me well enough," he continued, "and long enough. You must know whether or not you love me, or even if you don't know now you will some time, Loraine, for I love you so much it is enough for both of us."

"I don't know whether I do or not," said Loraine, slowly, at last; "it is so unexpected. I never have thought of you as anything but a friend. You seem like a brother or cousin, we have been together so much. Of course I like you, I am awfully fond of you, but—" she paused, and Sidney eagerly took up the word.



“ ‘BUT I DON’T WANT TO, SIDNEY’ ”

"But that is enough," said he. "You like me, you are fond of me! That is enough for now, and you will marry me, Lorraine, when college is over and I am making something. You know I have a little of my own, so it won't be very long to wait. Say yes!"

He sat down beside her again on the log and put his arm around her.

"Say yes, Lorraine!"

"But I don't want to, Sidney," said she. "I don't think I love you in that way. Why can't we just be friends as we always have been? It is so much nicer."

"Pshaw! I don't agree with you, and I don't want you for a friend. I have plenty of girl friends, and you are something far nearer and dearer than any one of them could ever be. Well, all I can say is that if you won't marry me, Lorraine, I shall just give up everything. I don't know what will become of me, and I shall probably go straight to the dogs. It is hard enough to keep out of it at college, anyhow; so you see what you will be responsible for."

The boy did not realize in the least what he was saying, nor the position in which he was placing the girl whom he professed to love so truly.

"Lorraine, please say yes," he pleaded. "You don't love any one else, do you?"

"No, of course not!" replied Lorraine, with sudden fire

"And you do like me a little?"

"Yes, I like you very much; you know that, Sidney. I have always liked you; I am very fond of you, but—"

"Then that is enough," said Sidney, triumphantly; "that is all I ask. The rest will come in time, I'm sure, and you will see what a good effect this will have on me, Loraine. Please say yes, darling!"

And Loraine said it, and so this boy and girl, scarcely realizing at the time the extent of the solemnity of that which they were promising, vowed to love each other to the end of their lives.

After the first surprise and hesitation, Loraine began to think that she cared far more for Sidney than she could have supposed possible. Since early days they had been the best of friends. No one could help liking him, for his cheery, laughter-loving nature made him a favorite with every one with whom he came in contact. He was handsome, too, and added to his fine features was the merry, open expression of his blue eyes, which won friends for him at the first glance.

On the whole, Loraine felt very happy as she sat with her boyish lover in the September woods that afternoon, while the little Wissahickon tumbled between its banks and an occasional carriage or bicycle passed on the road beneath them, only to make them realize more fully that they were alone.

They agreed that no public announcement should be made of their engagement until Sidney's college course should come to an end. He would only tell Alan, while Mr. and Mrs. Lee, whose consent, of course, must be obtained, should be the only ones whom they would take into their confidence on Loraine's side.

"Though there would be no harm in my telling Janet," said Loraine. "She would never tell."



“ ‘SIDNEY DIDN'T WRITE THEM’ ”



"Oh yes, of course, Janet," agreed Sidney; and just then they heard her voice.

"We would like to know what has become of you?" she called from the road. "Here are your wheels, and I can just see Loraine's gray skirt. What do you mean by hiding this way? We have come all the way back to see where you were."

Sidney and Loraine sprang to their feet and hurried down the hill.

"Oh, you have come back! Loraine's chain is broken, and it was impossible to do anything with it," said Sidney, with an attempt at elaborate explanation. "Do you see, Al? It was the narrowest shave that she didn't get a bad fall. We have been waiting for you here."

"Oh, you've been waiting for us, have you?" said Alan, dryly, while Janet glanced at Loraine's pink cheeks and noted Sidney's embarrassed manner. "And how did you think that we were going to know you were waiting? If we hadn't just happened to see your wheels hidden behind the bushes here we should have gone home. You might have had to wait a good while—not that I suppose it would have made a particle of difference to you."

"Indeed it would," said Loraine; "we only sat down to rest because Sidney said—at least, because I was very tired—that is, Sidney said—"

"Oh, 'Sidney said,' did he?" remarked Janet. "Well, Sidney may keep on saying as long as he likes. I am going to take a longer ride. Are you coming, Alan?"

She mounted her wheel and was off, followed almost immediately by Alan.

"I don't believe you need us," he said, as he rode away. His face wore the peculiar look it invariably assumed when things were going wrong, and his manner was what it was years ago when girls were considered a superfluity.

"Why, how queer they are!" exclaimed Loraine. "Do you think they could have suspected anything?"

"No, of course not," returned Sidney, easily; "and even if they did, what would it matter?" he added, with masculine indifference. "It is no concern of theirs, and I don't see why they should be grumpy over it. They have probably been fighting themselves. Janet teases Alan to death sometimes. But now that they are gone there is no reason why we should hurry. Let us go up again and sit down, Loraine. We have a lot to talk about. Come."

But this Loraine did not wish to do. She said that they had a long walk before them and it was high time that they should start. Sidney was forced to submit, and very soon they were walking up the road, Sidney leading both wheels, while Loraine kept pace with him, saying little and not listening with absolute attention to what he said to her, though of this Sidney was blissfully unconscious. Radiant with his own happiness, it did not occur to him that Loraine had grown very quiet.

She was wondering why Alan should have seemed to be offended. Why should he care whether she and Sidney stopped by the roadside or not? Loraine felt

uncomfortable about it. She and Alan had become such good friends that she did not want any cloud to come between them on the last afternoon.

Janet and Alan, in the meantime, had put spurs to their steeds of steel and were flying across the country. The roads were good in all directions, and Janet was suddenly seized with a desire to ride as fast and as furiously as she could, and this wish Alan seemed to share. They said nothing, but rode on until fully six or eight miles had been covered in an incredibly short space of time.

"There," said Janet, at last, slowing up a bit, "I feel better! I was awfully provoked at those two, weren't you?"

"Why were you provoked?" asked Alan, avoiding a direct answer.

"Oh, I don't know. They seemed so idiotic; and I do think it was awfully mean of them not to be on the lookout for us. We might have gone all the way home looking for them. I really thought there might have been some bad accident, didn't you?"

"Oh no. I thought they were capable of looking out for themselves."

"You don't mind things a bit, do you, Alan?" said Janet, presently.

"What is there to mind in the present instance?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing, I suppose."

After all, upon thinking it over, there was nothing. Another day Janet would have thought little of it if two of the party had fallen behind, and it was true that it had been caused by an accident which could

not have been prevented. She had hoped, though, that this afternoon would have been different. When they had started, Alan with her and Sidney with Loraine, she had supposed that as usual they would change about for the ride home. This was the last afternoon, and, though it would be up-hill all the way, Janet had unconsciously been looking forward to the ride home.

That evening Sidney spent at the Lees, but Alan remained at home and played backgammon with his aunt Evelina. When the rubber had been gained by the lady she entertained her nephew with many reminiscences suggested by the fact of her having won, and Alan gave every evidence of paying close attention, until Uncle Simon called from his museum door that it was time that the lights were out and the family in bed.

Mrs. West tripped hastily up-stairs and Alan was left alone, for the younger boys had already gone back to boarding-school. He went into Uncle Thad's library, and, opening the blinds to let in the moonlight which flooded the world without, he waited for Sidney to come home.

"Alan, old fellow!" said his cousin, when he at last came in, clapping him on the shoulder as he spoke—"Alan, I'm the happiest and the luckiest man in the world! The best, the dearest, the sweetest girl that ever lived has promised to marry such a good-for-nothing rascal as I am. Can you guess who it is?"

"The best, the dearest, the sweetest girl that ever lived' can only be Loraine Lee," said Alan, quietly.

"Right you are, old fellow! I didn't think you

would hit the nail on the head so exactly," said Sidney, laughing excitedly. "Let me tell you all about it."

And then for two hours Alan listened while Sidney talked.

CHAPTER XIX

THE next day the boys went back to Cambridge. They did not leave Germantown until late in the afternoon, for they were to take a night-train for Boston, and the greater part of the day Sidney spent at the Lees'.

Alan went to Philadelphia, saying that there were various matters to which he must attend, and little was seen of him all day, while Janet did not appear at all. Loraine, wondering that a whole day should elapse without her coming, sent Sidney to see what had become of her soon after luncheon. He returned almost immediately with the information that he had seen Mrs. Gordon but not Janet. The latter had sent good-bye to him through her sister. She herself had a headache and could not come down.

"How very odd!" exclaimed Loraine; "I never knew Janet to have a headache in her life. I hope she isn't going to be ill. I must go around to see her right away."

"Oh, not now, Loraine," urged Sidney. "You had better not disturb her, and it is my last afternoon. Do stay with me; Janet is all right."

But Loraine was firm, and presently she went to Mrs. Gordon's. She met with no better success, however. Mrs. Gordon came out on the little vine-cov-

ered porch and with an anxious face told her that she could not imagine what was the matter with Janet.

“She may have ridden too far yesterday,” said the unsuspecting Cynthia, “for she seemed tired and out of sorts last night, and she hasn’t left her room to-day. She told me she couldn’t see any one, even you, Loraine; so I think you had better not go up. If she is no better to-morrow I will send for the doctor.”

But when the next day came Janet appeared to be quite herself again.

The boys went off and the world seemed a very humdrum place without them. Loraine could scarcely realize that she was actually engaged to be married. Mr. and Mrs. Lee had at first been unwilling to give their consent to a formal engagement. They considered that Sidney and Loraine were both too young to know their own minds; but when Loraine reminded her mother that she had been engaged at seventeen herself, and when she had joined with Sidney in pleading for their permission—for a little opposition served to make her more anxious for it herself than yesterday she would have thought possible—Mr. and Mrs. Lee yielded, expressly stipulating, however, that no one should know of it until Sidney graduated with the exception of Alan and Janet Franklin.

Janet, when Loraine told her about it the following day, received the news very quietly—too quietly by far, Loraine thought. She had hoped to astonish her friend, instead of which Janet almost took the

words out of her mouth. She was on the porch, looking a little pale but otherwise as bright as usual, when Loraine came up the walk. Neal, junior, was digging in his own particular flower-bed, pulling up by the roots the weeds which he had as carefully planted yesterday. He was a stalwart young person of four now, who ruled with a rod of iron the entire household with the exception of his small sister, whose abject slave he was.

Loraine sat down on the wicker sofa and took out her embroidery. Although it was almost October the weather had become very warm, and it seemed as if summer had returned. She intended to open the subject at once, but she must first ask Janet if she had quite recovered.

"Of course," replied Janet, in answer to these inquiries. "You know I am never ill."

"That is just what I thought," said Loraine, "and so I was really frightened when Cynthia told me yesterday you couldn't see me; it did seem so strange."

"Well, I didn't really feel like seeing any one then. I was perfectly wretched. Neal," interrupting herself, "you naughty child! you are pulling up mamma's pretty flowers. Oh, what a boy he is! Cynthia has gone to town and left him in my charge, and I wish she hadn't. The trouble is, I sympathize with him too deeply really to scold him. Cynthia says he does all the things I used to do when I was a child. I must have been a little terror in those days."

Janet's tongue seemed to be wound up, and Loraine wondered when she should have a chance to impart her news. The boy's attention being at last success-

fully removed from the too attractive flowers, Janet resumed her seat.

"Is there any one about?" asked Loraine, presently.

"Not a creature. The nurse is up-stairs with the baby, and the other servants are in the kitchen. Why?"

"I have something to tell you."

Loraine had let the linen she was embroidering fall into her lap and was absently poking her needle in and out of her work-bag.

"Have you?" said Janet, with great animation. "I thought you had, and I believe I can guess what it is."

"Indeed you can't! You would never guess in the world. Why, even I am surprised, and if I am what will you be? You could *never* guess it."

"Let me try. You have come to tell me you are engaged to Sidney."

Loraine looked at her in astonishment.

"Why, how did you know? Have you seen Sidney? Did he tell you?"

"No, indeed. I haven't seen him since day before yesterday."

"Then Alan must have told you."

"I haven't seen Alan. He never came near me to say good-bye—just like him, though."

"But how did you find out?" demanded Loraine.

"Oh, I guessed it. It didn't take the wisdom of Solomon to see how things were going, and as soon as you began to talk this morning and blushed like a peony and said you had something to tell me, of course I knew right away what it was."

"But, Janet, I was so surprised myself! Did you—did you ever think Sidney cared for me in that way?"

She put the question timidly. It seemed almost too sacred a subject to discuss openly in the broad light of day, and yet she wanted to talk to her dearest friend.

"I never thought anything at all about it," replied Janet, with such evident coldness in her voice that Loraine felt almost hurt. "I have too much else to think about to notice whether people are falling in love or not. I can't imagine what you want to be engaged for. Neal, do come away from those flowers! Come up here on the porch and Aunt Janet will tell you a story. *She* is never going to be engaged—no, indeed! She's going to be your nice maiden aunt, your old aunt Jane to the end of the chapter."

Neal, junior, attracted by the promise, cast aside his garden tools and climbed into his aunt's lap, and then Janet began the story. Loraine knew from past experience what its length would probably be, and presently she gathered up her work and went home.

"I think Janet might have said more," she thought. "If I had been in her place and she had told me that she was engaged to Sidney, I should certainly have been more interested."

It did not occur to the girl that it was strange that she could imagine such a changed situation with calmness.

That afternoon Janet came to see her with the obvious intention of making amends for her indifference of the morning, and she was so sweet and affectionate

that Loraine soon forgot that she had ever been anything else, and harmony was restored.

With the exception of a daily letter from Sidney, which must be answered as often, there was little to remind Loraine that such a marked change had come into her existence, and so life went on until Thanksgiving Day.

This was a day to which the friends in Germantown had long been looking forward, for the great football game was then to be played between the Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania teams on the grounds in West Philadelphia, and Alan Ransford was full-back on the Harvard side. Sidney was coming on with the others, although he was not one of the eleven, and it was to be a time of great rejoicing, for all the Harvard sympathizers were quite convinced that this time Harvard would certainly win.

At last the day so long anticipated dawned clear and bright—ideal football weather, every one said. The Gordons and Lees went to church, and then, after a hasty luncheon, they took the train to Philadelphia. The boys had arrived the night before, but only Sidney had come out to Germantown, accompanied, much to the delight of Mrs. Gordon and Janet, by their brother, Jack Franklin, who had come ostensibly to pass Thanksgiving with them, but really, they strongly suspected, to see the game.

The ladies of the party were all adorned with Jacqueminot roses and the crimson ribbons of Harvard, while the men were also appropriately decorated, with the exception of Mr. Lee. He, being a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, refused to wear

any colors but those of his *alma mater*, while he was secretly hoping all the time, so Loraine declared, that Harvard would come off victorious.

"It is all very well to be loyal in the abstract," said she, "but when it comes right down to the point, and some one whom we know as well as we know Alan is playing on the Harvard side, why, *of course*, we want Harvard to win; you know we do, father."

And she seized the crimson flag with which Sidney had armed himself and shook it gayly in the November breeze.

Their seats had been engaged long before, and proved to be excellent ones in every respect. Such a simmer of excitement as there was in the air, such vast crowds of people thronging through the gates, such a waving of colors—the wearers of the red and blue perhaps outnumbering the crimsons. Then the shouts and yells of the sympathizers with the opposing factions, the scraps of college songs which were sung, containing stingingly sarcastic references to the other side! Who has not been to one of the great intercollegiate games, and who has not been thrilled through and through, and shouted and waved and clapped with the crowd, and felt that life would not be worth living if one's own particular college did not come off victor in the mighty battle which was about to be waged?

And presently, when every seat, every inch of space, was occupied, the two teams came trotting on to the field, to be received with redoubled enthusiasm, the "Rah! rah! rah!" of Harvard and the "Penn-sylva-ni-a" of the home team mingling in the frosty air!

There was Alan's tall figure, plainly to be distinguished from the others by reason of his unusual height and breadth, which made him a valuable member of the team apart from his intelligent playing.

Loraine clapped her hands with delight when she discovered him. "Doesn't he look splendid?" she whispered to Janet, who was next to her. "I do like big men!"

After a few preliminaries the teams fell into position, and the thrilling moment came and went. The game had begun! There is no need to follow it in its details. It was a closely fought battle, a glorious exhibition of strength and skill on both sides, and for some time it was doubtful which one would come off victorious. In the first half Harvard was ahead, and when the intermission came it seemed to Loraine and Janet that the defeat of their opponents was an assured thing. Jack Franklin and Neal Gordon, however, were not so confident, and even Sidney was forced to agree with them. The Pennsylvania men were fighting like young gladiators, and their determination to win was depicted in every line of their stalwart figures.

"There is no knowing," said Mr. Gordon. "I sha'n't feel sure until the game is actually over."

The fight had thus far been chiefly at the other end of the field, but now that the second half had begun the game was being played directly under the eyes of those on the grandstand, where Loraine and her friends were seated.

It seemed even more thrilling now and quite different. When the playing had been at the lower end

of the field, distance had softened the effect; now she could hear the thumps and the heavy breathing; she could see one man after another lying apparently unconscious, while the others waited for him to revive; and though her friends assured her that this did not mean that there had been actual injury, and though Jack Franklin, who had been in his day a noted player in the Harvard team, declared that "it wasn't half as bad as it looked—they weren't really hurt—only getting their breath," Loraine found herself hoping that Alan would not experience the necessity of getting *his* breath. It did not look pleasant, even if they did say that it meant nothing.

Strangely enough, in the midst of all her excitement and enthusiasm, Loraine began to feel an unaccountable dread lest Alan should be hurt. Defeat for Harvard was now, alas, a certain thing, but not until there had been one tremendous rally. Down on the twenty-five yard line, in front of the Harvard goal, the two teams faced each other once more, and while they glared at one another like an army of wild-cats drawn up in battle array, suddenly, with the determination and the strength of a Hercules, Alan Ransford's dark head went darting through a hole in the line.

Right through the centre he shot, and before he was stopped he had gained twelve yards. Harvard had forced the ball back to the centre of the field, and all the wearers of the crimson rose as one man, while great shouts of "Harvard! Harvard! Harvard!" rolled out upon the autumn air, echoing to the very Delaware the triumph of the Massachusetts men.

And Loraine was on her feet, shouting with the rest, until she saw that this time Alan had been hurt. He did not leave the game at first, but hurled himself again at the Pennsylvania line, and it fell back a few yards, but presently he was obliged to yield to the pain which was actually forcing the tears from his eyes. He staggered a short distance from the thick of the fight and then fell.

Loraine, watching him with eyes and thought for nothing else, gave a little gasping cry.

"There, he is hurt!" said she. "I knew he would be. I know he is killed. Go to him somebody—quick!"

She felt giddy and leaned heavily against Janet, who at first did not guess the trouble.

"What is the matter, Loraine?" she asked, seating herself and drawing Loraine down, for they had been standing with the rest; "what is it? Don't look so strange."

"I tell you, Alan is hurt!"

"Well, what if he is?" said Janet, impatiently. "What else do you expect in football? Don't behave like a goose, Loraine. People will look at you."

But no one paid any attention to Loraine, for it was evident that something serious had occurred on the field. The mighty shouts of "Ransford! Ransford!" had ceased for a moment, while Ransford himself lay unconscious on the ground, and the eyes of that vast concourse of people watched the physician who bent over him and the anxious friends who gathered about him.

To Loraine, forced into silence by Janet's peremp-

tory tones, the time seemed hours that he lay there. It was four or five minutes perhaps before he opened his eyes, and then, realizing where he was and what had happened, he insisted upon being raised to his feet, and supported by willing hands he was half led half carried from the field where he had just distinguished himself by such a mighty effort.

The roars of the multitude broke out afresh when they saw him upright once more, both sides joining in the well-merited applause; and then a substitute took his place, and the game went on without him, Pennsylvania winning with a score of eight to six.

And in the meantime what had happened to Lorraine? With a rush had come over her the realization of what it all meant. In a flash she knew why she cared so much. When she saw Alan lying as one dead upon the field she knew what it would mean to her if Alan *were* dead. It was Alan Ransford whom she loved, and she had promised to marry Sidney West!

Why had she not guessed it before? Why had she been so stupid, so blind to her own heart's emotions? Looking back it seemed impossible that she had not been aware of them—and yet there was no time to look back. Sitting there on the grandstand of Franklin Field with the crowds who were shouting themselves hoarse around her, the cries of victory in her ears, the lamentations of her own friends who were forced to acknowledge now that their side was beaten, she came face to face with one of the most awful realities that can come into the life of a woman.

She had given her promise to the wrong man.

Mechanically she watched the game draw to a close. She saw Bingham, the wonderful kicker, being raised on the shoulders of his fellow-players and borne triumphantly from the field ; she rose when the others did and followed her friends through the exit-gates. Sidney came to her—he had been upon the ground when Alan was hurt and had remained with him—and lamented to her of their loss, but she looked at him blankly. She wanted to ask him how Alan was doing, but she dared not trust her voice.

Fortunately some one else—she did not know who—asked the question, and the answer was encouraging.

“Oh, he is coming round all right,” said Sidney, with the sanguine spirit of the football advocate ; “he’ll have a lame knee for a while, but nothing serious.”

And then they went over to the station and took the train for Germantown. Mr. and Mrs. Gordon rallied Loraine upon her changed appearance and laughed at her for taking the defeat so to heart, and Janet joined with them, thinking it best to pass over the incident as lightly as possible. She was quite sure, however, that something far more serious was the trouble with Loraine than the mere losing of a game. With the keen insight of one who was herself vitally interested, she guessed what might be the matter, and with all the loyalty of a true friend she strove to hide from Loraine herself as well as from the others that she had made the discovery.

Mrs. Lee looked anxiously at her daughter and

secretly wondered at her pale face, while Mr. Lee joked about the game and pretended to be very much elated that "his side" had won; and so they went home and the party separated, and ate their Thanksgiving dinners, and talked over the details of the game and laughed and made merry, while Loraine, burdened with her tragic knowledge, wondered if she could be the same unconscious, happy girl who had left home that morning.

There was no time now to collect her thoughts, and there would be none until, the evening over, she could go to her room and think, and think, and berate herself for her own stupidity, as she called it, and try to see her way out of the complications which were closing above her head.

And, in the meantime, Sidney was with her—Sidney, who loved her so truly and whose wife she had promised to be. She must talk to him, must listen to his earnest protestations of devotion, must sympathize with his plans for the future, all the time feeling as if she were a hypocrite of the deepest dye.

"I ought to have known, I ought to have known!" she said to herself again and again that evening.

And at last the evening drew to a close, the last good-nights were said, and Loraine was safe in her own room.

Then, and not wholly until then, did the hopelessness of it all come over her. Then only did she fully understand what was before her.

"I actually confess to myself," said she, almost aloud, "that I care for some one who I *know* does

not care for me in the least—indeed, I am sure he scarcely likes me! But even if he did, what difference would it make? I have promised Sidney. Oh, Loraine Lee, what have you come to, and what will you do?”

CHAPTER XX

FOR long hours that night Loraine lay awake, staring into the darkness and wondering what course she should take. First one side of the subject presented itself, and then another. What if she were to break her engagement? Would it not have a disastrous effect upon Sidney's career, in college and afterwards? Despair might drive him to all sorts of terrible things which it made her tremble even to think of.

He had said that the thought of her had kept him already from harm; what if the loss of her drove him into it? She, and she alone, would then be responsible, she said to herself. And yet if she did not love him, would it not be equally wrong to become his wife?

At last, harassed and distracted by her conflicting emotions, by her desire to do what was right to Sidney and her utter abhorrence of her seeming hypocrisy, she found herself unable to think clearly. Her brain was in a turmoil, and she would probably have been ill had she not, from utter exhaustion of mind and body, fallen into a sleep so profound that not even a dream disturbed it. When she awoke, the late November sun had already risen.

At first she could not remember what had hap-

pened. She was conscious of a heavy weight upon her heart, a terrible certainty that something was wrong, that some calamity had come to pass. It is a familiar feeling which the waking hour brings to many, but which had never come to Loraine before. And then the meaning of it swept over her. Only too well did she remember the vigil of the night. But now her course lay clear before her, and her doubts, her uncertainty, had vanished. There was but one thing for her to do, and that was to tell Sidney that their engagement must come to an end. Anything else, she felt, would be wrong, for there must be nothing but the truth between them.

And so that day, when Sidney came to see her, very gently and tenderly she broke it to him that she could never marry him. She had discovered, fortunately before it was too late, that she did not love him and that she never could.

Sidney was at first completely overwhelmed. He would not believe it; he stormed and protested; he said things to Loraine of which afterwards he was profoundly ashamed, for he knew them to be both unjust and untrue. But Loraine did not resent his words, so deeply did she censure herself for ever having mistaken her own heart.

He refused to believe that her decision was final until, upon his asking her if she cared for any one else, she had said yes, hoping thus to silence him. Then he had realized that further discussion or entreaty would be worse than useless. He was too much of a gentleman to ask her further, but Loraine knew that he wondered who it was, and an awful

dread seized her lest he should guess. She need not have feared, however. The old hostility which had existed in the past between Alan and Loraine—even though latterly close association seemed to have softened the feeling—was such an established fact in the mind of Sidney that he never for an instant suspected that time could have worked such a change.

Finally the stormy interview came to an end. Sidney rushed from the house without a word of farewell, and Loraine, blinded with the tears which she had been forcing back for the last hour, went to her mother. She told her that she had broken her engagement with Sidney because she found that she did not love him, and in her mother's arms she found comfort. It was indeed a relief to hear that she had done what was right, and to be spared any further questioning.

If Mrs. Lee suspected what had actually happened she gave no sign of doing so. She had feared from the first that Loraine, who in many ways was still a child, had not really been sure of her own mind, and the mother's heart rejoiced that she had awakened to a knowledge of it before it was too late.

They did not see the boys again. Sidney went to town that day, and almost immediately he and Alan returned to Cambridge. Alan's knee was seriously injured, but he was anxious to get back, and the surgeons promised that if he were careful it would recover in time.

One evening—it was about a week after their return to college—the two cousins were alone in their room. This was unusual, for they were both popular

in the class and their study was apt to be the common resort of a number of the fellows, but to-night something had called most of the men in other directions, and for the first time since Thanksgiving Day Alan and Sidney had a few hours to themselves.

Alan sat in the big Morris chair by the table, with his leg stretched out before him and a pile of books at his elbow. He was supposed to be reading, but it is doubtful if he paid close attention to the printed page. He was wondering what could be the matter with Sidney. Since their visit to Philadelphia he had noticed that he was moody and low-spirited. It was always plainly to be seen when something had gone wrong with the boy, for like many light-hearted people he was correspondingly depressed at times, and Alan felt sure that on this occasion the trouble, whatever it was, was deep-seated.

Although there was but the difference of a few months in their ages, for some reason Alan felt years older than his cousin, and since their uncle Thad's death he had assumed a secret care and watchfulness for Sidney's welfare which the younger boy did not realize. As he lay back in the chair, the light from the study lamp bringing out the lines of determination in his strong, firmly cut mouth and chin, his keen brown eyes watching Sidney, he looked fully ten years older than the slender young fellow who was pacing the room with boyish restlessness.

"What's the matter, Sid?" said Alan, at last.

"Matter? Oh, nothing of any account."

"Yes, there is. You needn't try to put me off

that way. Something *is* the matter, and you may as well trot it out."

"I believe I will tell you," said Sidney, pausing for a moment in his walk. Then he moved away again, stopping to look at the photographs on the mantel-shelf, the books in the cases, the thousand and one articles which decked the room and served to make it beautiful in the eyes of its owners. Sidney was thinking how little difference these things made, and wondering how he could ever have taken sufficient interest in the room to spend the hours that he had over the decorations.

"Well, I'm ready," remarked Alan, tossing his book aside, after waiting fully five minutes for Sidney to continue.

"I dare say you are," said Sidney. "Well, then, Loraine has thrown me over."

"Ah!"

A quick contraction of Alan's features as he uttered this one word attracted Sidney's attention for the moment, but he was too much absorbed in his own emotions to wonder what it meant. If he had he would no doubt have concluded that the expression was one of pain. Alan had probably moved his lame knee.

"And why?"

His cousin's voice was certainly peculiar, but this also made no impression upon Sidney.

"That is just it—why?" repeated he, excitedly. "The reason is a pretty poor one, *I* think! Because she finds that she doesn't care for me in the right way. She says that she can never love me because—"

And then he stopped. He had no right to betray

Lorraine's secret, and, fortunately for it and for his own self-respect, he thought of this in time.

"And is all over between you?" Alan asked.

"All is over—everything at an end. Lorraine has jilted me, and I shall go straight to the bad."

"Oh no, you won't," said Alan. "Don't talk like a fool, Sid. You have enough of the man in you to stand up like a man and take a blow. It is much better for you than if she had married you and you had found it out afterwards. It was pretty plucky of her to tell you when she did, for it couldn't have been easy. I wonder when she found it out?"

"I don't know. All I know is that Lorraine was very quiet and awfully odd Thanksgiving night, and the next day when I went to see her she blurted right into it. But it's funny, Al, that you look at it the way you do. You've always been so down on girls, and especially on Lorraine, that I supposed of course you would blame her pretty severely."

Alan had moved his face into the shadow, and Sidney could not see his expression as he answered: "I was young when I felt that way. I know better now what good stuff girls—that is, some girls—are made of, and I don't believe Lorraine Lee would do anything but what was right in a case of this kind. But I'm sorry enough for you, Sid, old fellow! Tell me more about it."

"Oh, there isn't a great deal to tell. Of course, my life is ruined. I shall never be happy again, and I may as well make up my mind to it. You can't understand this, of course. I don't suppose you will ever fall in love. Oh, Lorraine, Lorraine, I can't give you up!"

He threw himself on the divan and buried his head in his arms. For hours the boy talked, foolishly much of the time, but perhaps with reason for it, for injured pride is hard to endure; but slowly Alan succeeded in inducing him to look at the affair in a different light. In time, influenced by his arguments, Sidney consented to write to Loraine, apologizing for much that he had said at their last interview.

It was a cold epistle, containing many a finely turned sentence, and written apparently in the spirit of heaping coals of fire on the head of the recipient, but Loraine was glad to get it, and she answered it with such a sweet, repentant note, that Sidney, touched to the heart, could not help giving it to Alan to read. He forgot one sentence that was in it which perhaps he had no right to show, and which made an impression upon Alan :

“If I had not made the humiliating discovery in time, think how tragic life would have been for us both. It will always be sad for me, but I hope something better is in store for you.”

“What can she mean?” thought Alan. “It was not humiliating to find that she didn’t love Sidney, and why should her life be sad?”

But he asked no questions and made no comment when he returned the note to Sidney’s keeping.

Sidney did not visit Germantown again for many months. The following vacations he spent at other places, going to Brighton for part of the summer and paying frequent visits there besides. Loraine heard of him through Janet, who mentioned in her letters his occasional coming to Oakleigh, but gave few details.

Alan made one or two flying trips to Germantown to visit his uncle, but Loraine scarcely saw him, and only breathed freely when he was gone, for she had an agonizing fear lest her secret should be discovered. The younger boys came back to Germantown for their vacations, but they usually stayed at the Lees'. Charles and Tom were doing well at school, and it was decided through the good offices of Mr. and Mrs. Lee that Charles should go to the Institute of Technology in Boston to take a course in mechanical engineering. It had been his uncle Thaddeus's wish that the boy's tendency for that line of work should be encouraged and developed, and Uncle Simon was willing to agree.

Tom had as yet shown no particular talent except for having as good a time as possible, and neither he nor any one else knew what his future profession would be, while Jimmy was as yet too young for any plans to be made.

And at last the four years of Alan and Sidney at college drew to a close, and the June came which was to see the cousins graduate. In the spring, very much to her surprise after the long silence, Loraine received another letter from Sidney. It was written in the friendliest spirit possible, and apparently with the intention of proving to her that by-gones were now to be forever by-gones.

He told her of their plans for class-day, and begged her to make arrangements to be there. He wrote:

"We want our old friends around us, and I should feel very queer if you were missing. Janet told me that she was going to ask you to come on for it, and I hope with all my heart that

you will. Alan and I will see to it that your first class-day is a success."

And later came a note from Alan. It was the first that Loraine had ever had from him, and she felt a curious sensation when the letter was given to her and she recognized the small, decided handwriting of the address.

Taking it from the maid who brought it to her in the library, Loraine slipped it without having opened it into her pocket. Then as soon as it was possible she ran up-stairs to her own room.

"What has he written to me about?" she thought, turning the letter over and over. "What a funny little handwriting for such a big fellow! but somehow it looks like Alan. I wonder what it is about?"

After several minutes of pleased anticipation she allowed herself to break the seal. She read:

"DEAR LORAINÉ, — Won't you come to our class-day? Sidney says he has written to you, and I want to add my word of entreaty. I am sure you will enjoy it, for Harvard class-day is different from anything else, and you ought not to miss it. Besides, we poor fellows who haven't any sisters want our friends to be with us. Please come.

"Sincerely yours,

"ALAN RANSFORD.

"Sidney is very well and is graduating splendidly."

Loraine laughed when she read the note.

"It is just like Alan," said she to herself. "I never knew that sisters were particularly desirable for class-day. I always fancied that other fellows' sisters were needed. Ah, well, I'll go and 'be a

sister' to Alan ! It is rather foolish for me to go and singe my wings, but I can't very well refuse after hearing from them both, and—and—I do want to see class-day, and—" She did not finish the sentence even to herself.

"It was nice of him to add that about Sidney," she thought, as she locked the note carefully away in her desk. "That was to show me that it is all right for me to come, as far as he is concerned. How thoughtful Alan is ! So often he reminds me of Uncle Thad, and yet in other ways he is so different. But how pleased dear Uncle Thad would be if he knew his dear boys were doing so well, and that Alan had actually asked *me* to come to class-day!"

For some reason, after this Loraine felt happier than she had for many a day in the past. She had guarded her secret carefully, and no one would have ever suspected that the seemingly gay and light-hearted girl had not all that she desired in the world. In this she had succeeded ; but she had found that, try as she would, it was impossible as yet to think of Alan with the indifference that she would have liked to feel for him.

Mr. and Mrs. Lee, as well as Loraine, were invited to Oakleigh for class-day, a warm friendship between them and Mr. and Mrs. Franklin having been brought about during the visits of the latter to Germantown, and Neal and Cynthia Gordon also went "home," as they called it, for the eventful day.

And when the day came it was clear and warm and beautiful, as class-day weather always is, and the girls were as pretty and the dresses as charming and

the seniors as truly delightful as they have been since time immemorial and always will be. Loraine, in her dainty white frock and her big hat, moved and felt like one in a dream. Sidney, who had welcomed them with unaffected pleasure, seemed like his old self of years ago, before there had ever been the slightest thought of anything but the most comfortable boy-and-girl friendship.

He was unmistakably glad to see her, but he appeared very much more glad to see Janet—which was strange, as he had been at Oakleigh only the week before. Loraine, watching them with keen eyes, noted the air of appropriation with which Sidney greeted her friend and with which, as soon as the first welcomes were over, he had calmly walked away with her. She looked after them in astonishment, and then her glance fell upon Alan, who, unknown to her, was watching her in his turn.

“Is it well with Sidney now?” she asked, not stopping to weigh her words, but confident that Alan would understand.

“Very well,” said he, smiling down at her.

“Oh, I am so thankful!” she exclaimed. “Now I can breathe freely once more. For a year and a half I have been worried about Sidney and have reproached myself bitterly for what I really could not help; but I see how things are going. *Now* I can enjoy the day.”

“And I hope you will enjoy it,” said Alan, in his deep voice so like his uncle Thad’s. “I would like this to be the happiest day of your life.”

Loraine’s heart beat quickly. What did he mean?

And all that day she asked herself the question, while she wandered about, Alan always by her side, through the beautiful grounds, from the old buildings to the new, visiting spread after spread, chatting gaily with one person after another, dancing with the many delightful fellows whom the boys introduced and with those whom she already knew. And at the close of the day, while she sat looking at the "tree" and at the strange antics of the class as they climbed and tumbled and climbed again to reach the garland of flowers, until every blossom had been torn from its resting-place; still she wondered what Alan meant.

And it was not until the evening that he told her, when the band was playing for the dancing in Memorial Hall, and the members of the glee-club were singing on the steps of old Holworthy, and the Chinese lanterns were swaying gently in the June breeze, shedding a soft light on the merry men and maidens who wandered about on the green.

Loraine had been dancing, and when her partner took her back to her mother she found Alan waiting for her.

"Do you care to dance any more, Loraine?" said he. "Or will you come outside? Please come with me," he added, seeing her hesitate.

And so she went with him, and they left the college grounds, walking up the street under the shadow of the Cambridge elms. Neither said a word at first, and yet it did not seem strange to them to be walking there together in silence. Presently Alan spoke.

"I have something to say to you, Loraine," said he. "That is the reason I asked you to come out

here to walk, away from the crowd. Four years ago I made up my mind to say this to you on my class-day if I could. I suppose you will be surprised when you hear what it is."

He paused a moment, and then he went on :

"I haven't really had the slightest hope of succeeding, but I am going to try, all the same, and somehow to-day has made me feel a little bit encouraged, but I am afraid I have been stupid and bearish too long for there to be much chance of success. I used to think I didn't like girls and women, but you and your mother have shown me what girls and women can be, and as long ago as when I first came to college I made up my mind to say this to you when I graduated. Then came the time when I thought I was never going to be able to say it—when you were engaged to Sidney, I mean. Then that was off, and though I didn't think there was much hope for me, I made up my mind the night Sidney told me that I would carry out my old resolution and tell you on class-day. And now class-day has come at last, and you are here, and I am going to risk everything and tell you. But first tell me something. Has it been a happy day, Lorraine?"

"Very happy." Her voice was almost inaudible, but by bending towards her he could hear the two words.

"It has been so for me, too," he said, "for I have been with you. The most miserable day and place in the world would be made happy for me if you were with me, for I love you, Lorraine."

It seemed as if, having told her this, there was nothing more to be said.

He stopped under one of the big elms and took her two hands in his. They had wandered far from the college buildings, and the street was deserted. They were as much alone as if they had been miles from a human dwelling.

"Do you think that by any possibility you could try to love me, Loraine?"

"There is no need of trying," she said, looking bravely up into the earnest face above her, "for I love you already, Alan ; I have for a long time. And your class-day is the happiest day of my life."

THE END







